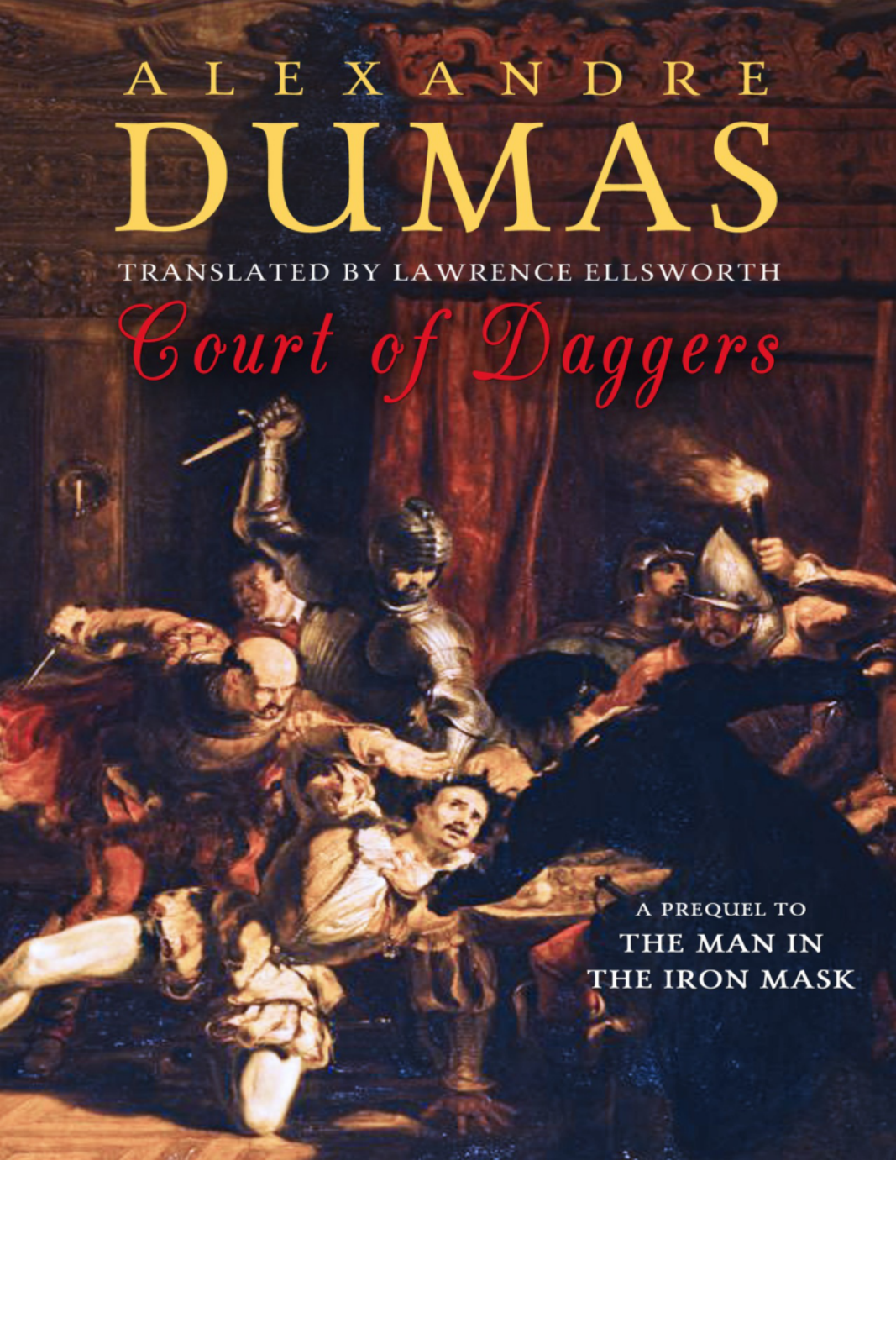


ALEXANDRE DUMAS

TRANSLATED BY LAWRENCE ELLSWORTH

Court of Daggers



A PREQUEL TO
THE MAN IN
THE IRON MASK

Court of Daggers

~ OR ~

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

Book Six of the Musketeers Cycle

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Bragelonne**

by Alexandre Dumas

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Court of Daggers

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

Bellsworth Court of Daggers is the second volume of Alexandre Dumas's mega-novel *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, his epic conclusion to the lives and adventures of the author's most beloved characters, the Four Musketeers, as well as their friends, families, allies, and enemies. Published in serial form in the Parisian weekly papers over three and a half years, the sprawling *Bragelonne's* ensemble cast, interleaved episodes, and long character arcs were an innovation in the modern novel form that hearkened back to earlier eras, to the serial pastorals of the 17th century and the French Arthurian epics of the 13th. Dumas's experimental approach opened up the form from the conventional structure used in *The Three Musketeers* and *Twenty Years*

After, utilizing extended storytelling methods that prefigured 21st-century long-form television series such as *Game of Thrones*, *Deadwood*, and *Westworld*.

The previous volume in this series, *Between Two Kings*, belonged to d'Artagnan, telling the tale of his swashbuckling escapade in England that restored the throne to Charles II. In *Court of Daggers*, the focus widens to the now-adult King Louis XIV and the key members of his newly established royal court, all vying for power and prestige in Dumas's intricate and interlaced web. Moving from viewpoint to viewpoint, the great storyteller introduces or expands upon the plots of d'Artagnan and Aramis, now covertly opposed to each other, of the money men Fouquet and Colbert, the romantic rivals Buckingham and de Guiche, the mismatched royal couple Madame Henrietta and Monsieur Philippe, courtiers and lovers Montalais and Malicorne, and the young demoiselle Louise de La Vallière, all come to pursue their ambitions at the Court of

Louis XIV in the orbit of a young king who is the most ambitious of any of them.

Amid the intrigues of these many agendas and aspirations, one character stands out from the others: the son of Athos, Vicomte Raoul de Bragelonne. Court of Daggers is his book, depicting the previously rather passive Raoul now come into full maturity, combining Athos's nobility and stoic resolve with d'Artagnan's convincing eloquence and even more convincing mastery of arms. Amid the overwrought passions of love and hatred swirling around the young king, Raoul emerges as the calm voice of sanity; when Buckingham, de Guiche, or de Wardes is about to commit some rash and unforgiveable act, it's Raoul who stops them with sheer moral force—and if that isn't enough, with a judicious flick of his sword. After having been lectured by his idol, d'Artagnan, for his naïveté for three volumes, Raoul even respectfully reproaches the musketeer when d'Artagnan contemplates defying their newly

ascendant king.

There's only one force Raoul cannot master: his own heart. In this he is also his father's son, for in his youth, Athos had conceived an all-consuming passion for a young woman named Anne de Breuil—and when she betrayed him, he killed her. (Or so he thought: she survived and returned as Milady de Winter.) Raoul in his turn is devoted to the young and innocent Louise de La Vallière, but it's a devotion that's possessive and borders on obsession. When Athos asks his son what he would do if he discovered he had a rival for Louise's affection, Raoul simply says he would kill him.

Le Vicomte de Bragelonne is a novel of the Romantic Era, and in the tropes of that time obsessive love always leads to tragedy. Court of Daggers establishes Raoul's admirable traits, his courage, resolution, loyal heart, and dedication to a knightly code of honor. This book is his, but the next volume belongs to Louise de La Vallière, and in it she'll

display her own strengths—and Raoul will find himself faced with a rival he cannot kill without betraying himself.

What Has Gone Before The previous volume, *Between Two Kings*, commenced ten years after the events of *Blood Royal* but continued that book's plots and themes. D'Artagnan had achieved the rank of Captain of the King's Musketeers at the end of *Blood Royal*, but in the interim, with the end of the rebellion of the Fronde, the promotion had been rescinded and d'Artagnan had returned to serving in the lower rank of lieutenant. With his three comrades once again scattered, and France at peace under the able but miserly rule of Cardinal Mazarin, d'Artagnan was bored. The young King Louis XIV had technically reached the age of majority, but in practice the duo of Queen Anne and Mazarin held onto the power of the regency and Louis lacked all authority.

In England, following the execution of King Charles I, a fate the

Four Musketeers had tried to forestall, the country had been ruled by Oliver Cromwell while the late king's son and heir, Charles II, lived in exile in the Netherlands. After Cromwell's death, rule of England was contested by two factions led by military leaders, Generals Monck and Lambert. In this division Charles II, though destitute, thought he saw an opportunity to regain the throne, and secretly visited Louis XIV to ask for his support in either money or troops. Louis wanted to help but the idea was quashed by Mazarin, and Charles was turned away.

As commander of the king's guards, d'Artagnan overheard the whole thing. Furious and disgusted with his French masters, he decided to take action himself on Charles's behalf, and resigned his position in the musketeers to do it. Bankrolled by his former lackey Planchet, now a successful Paris business owner, d'Artagnan conceived a bold exploit: with a few hired rogues, he would infiltrate Monck's army, abduct the general, and conduct him to Charles

II in Holland, where the king-in-exile could decide how best to take advantage of the situation.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to d'Artagnan, in France Charles had encountered the musketeer's old comrade Athos, who was keeper of a secret legacy confided to him on the scaffold by King Charles I: the location of a hidden cache of a million in gold to be spent to restore the Stuarts to the throne. Athos revealed this secret to Charles and undertook to personally recover the treasure—from the middle of General Monck's army.

By courage, wit, and luck, both d'Artagnan's and Athos's interlocking schemes were successful. Monck was convinced to support the restoration of the no-longer-destitute Charles II, England became a monarchy once more, and its young monarch was grateful to both musketeers, rewarding Athos with knightly honors and d'Artagnan with a moderate fortune. D'Artagnan was introduced to Charles's sister, the lively Princess

Henrietta, and also met the young second Duke of Buckingham, who was hopelessly smitten with Henrietta.

Meanwhile, in France, Cardinal Mazarin had died, and aspirants jockeyed to fill the resulting power vacuum. Mazarin had ruled France by controlling the public funds, and Nicolas Fouquet, the Superintendent of Finance, intended to continue that policy and step into Mazarin's shoes. But Louis XIV, finally freed from Mazarin's grip, wanted to rule on his own behalf rather than through ministers, which meant he'd need control of his own sources of wealth. Louis allied with the conniving but capable Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Mazarin's financier, who gave him access to the cardinal's hidden millions. That went a long way toward solving the king's money problem, but to rule, Louis would need a strong right arm as well. Learning of d'Artagnan's role in the Restoration of Charles II, Louis resolved to bring d'Artagnan back to his side and finally take full advantage of his talents. As Louis said in the novel's

final words, “Colbert holding my
purse and d’Artagnan wielding my
sword: I am king!”

A Note on the Translation of Court of Daggers:

Historical Character Note The first time a notable character from history is mentioned in the text, their name is marked with an asterisk.* A brief paragraph describing that person appears in the Historical Characters appendix at the end of the book.

I

A Passion

On arrival, upon returning from the *Palais Royal*, 1 Athos*, as we've seen, returned to his lodgings on Rue Saint-Honoré. There he found the Vicomte de Bragelonne* waiting for him in his rooms and chatting with *Grimaud*. 2

It was no easy thing to converse with the old servant, and only two men possessed the secret: Athos and d'Artagnan.* The first succeeded because Grimaud wanted to get him to speak; d'Artagnan, on the contrary, because he knew how to make Grimaud talk.

Raoul was trying to get the story of the journey to England out of Grimaud, who had told it in all its detail by way of gestures and about eight words, more or less. He had first indicated, by a sinuous wave of his hand, that he and his master had gone across the sea. "On some mission?" Raoul had asked.

Grimaud, in bowing his head, replied *yes*.

"In which Monsieur le Comte went into danger?" asked Raoul.

Grimaud shrugged his shoulders slightly as if to say, *not too much*.

"But still, there was danger!" insisted Raoul.

Grimaud pointed to a sword, the fire, and a musket hanging on the wall.

"Then, Monsieur le Comte had an enemy there?" cried Raoul.

"Monck," 3 Grimaud replied.

"It's strange," continued Raoul,

“that Monsieur le Comte persists in regarding me as a novice, refusing to share with me the honor and danger of these missions.”

Grimaud smiled.

At that moment Athos returned. The hotelier lit his way up the stairway, and Grimaud, recognizing his master’s footsteps, ran to meet him, which cut the conversation short.

But Raoul had begun asking questions and wasn’t about to stop. Gripping the count’s hands with tender respect, he said, “How is it, Monsieur, that you can go on a dangerous mission without bidding me farewell, let alone asking me to aid you with my sword—me, who should be your main support while in the strength of my youth? Me, whom you raised to act like a man? Ah, Monsieur! Would you risk putting me through the cruel ordeal of never seeing you again?”

“Who told you, Raoul, that my journey was dangerous?” replied the count, placing his cloak and hat in

the arms of Grimaud, who had just removed his sword.

“Me,” said Grimaud.

“And why is that?” asked Athos severely.

Grimaud was embarrassed; Raoul tried to come to his rescue by replying: “It’s natural, Monsieur, for our good Grimaud to tell me the truth when it concerns you. By whom will you be loved and supported if not by me?”

Athos made no reply. He dismissed Grimaud with a friendly gesture, then sat in an armchair while Raoul, still standing, hovered over him. “Besides,” Raoul continued, “it wasn’t just a journey, it was a mission ... one on which you were threatened by iron and fire.”

“No need to speak of that, Viscount,” said Athos softly. “I left quickly, it’s true, but the service of King Charles II* required an urgent departure. As for your concern, I thank you for it, and I know I can

count on you. Did you lack anything during my absence, Viscount?"

"Nothing, Monsieur, thank you."

"I had ordered Blaisois to issue you a hundred *pistoles* 4 if you needed money."

"Monsieur, I haven't seen Blaisois."

"Did you run short of money, then?"

"Monsieur, I had thirty pistoles left from the sale of the horses I captured in my last campaign, and Monsieur le Prince de Condé* had the kindness to let me win two hundred more at his card table three months ago."

"You, gambling? I don't like that, Raoul."

"I never gamble, Monsieur, but in Chantilly Monsieur le Prince had me hold his cards for him one night while he received a courier from the king. I played and won, and the prince told me to keep the winnings."

"Is that the custom in his

household, Raoul?" said Athos, frowning.

"Yes, Monsieur; every week Monsieur le Prince finds one excuse or another to let one of his gentlemen win some money. His Highness has fifty gentlemen, and my turn came up."

"Very well! *You went to Spain for the royal wedding?*" 5

"Yes, Monsieur, it was a lovely trip, and very interesting."

"And you've been back for about a month?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And during that month?"

"During the month?"

"Yes, what did you do?"

"My duty, Monsieur."

"You haven't gone home to La Fère?"

Raoul blushed. Athos gave his son

a look direct but calm.

“You would be wrong not to believe me,” said Raoul. “I blush because of my feelings despite myself. The question you do me the honor to ask me is bound to raise such emotions; I blush because I’m moved, not because I lie.”

“I know, Raoul, that you never lie.”

“No, Monsieur.”

“Besides, mon ami, you might be wrong about what I’m asking you....”

“I know what you mean, Monsieur—you want to know if I’ve been to Blois.”

“That’s it.”

“I didn’t go; I haven’t seen the person you’re alluding to.”

Raoul’s voice trembled as he said this. Athos, sensitive in delicate matters, immediately added, “Raoul, I see your feelings are wounded; you’re suffering.”

“A great deal, Monsieur—since you forbade me to go to Blois and see Mademoiselle de La Vallière* again.”

There the young man stopped; that sweet name, so lovely to say, tore his heart as it passed over his lips.

“And I did the right thing,” said Athos hastily. “I’m not a cruel or unjust father, I respect true love, but I foresee a particular future for you, a grand future. We’re at the dawn of a new reign, and war calls to the spirit of our chivalrous young king. What he needs to support this heroic ardor is a brigade of cavaliers who are young and free, who can charge into battle and fall, crying ‘Vive le roi!’ rather than, ‘Farewell, my wife!’ You understand that, Raoul. As heartless as my reasoning may seem, I implore you to listen to me and turn your gaze away from your younger days when you lived for love, soft and carefree days that weaken the heart until it can’t stand the strong drink we call glory and adversity. Raoul, I tell you again, see in my counsels only the desire to help you, nothing but the

ambition to see you prosper. I believe you capable of becoming a remarkable man; march forward alone, and you will march faster and farther.”

“You have commanded, Monsieur,” replied Raoul. “I obey.”

“Commanded!” cried Athos. “Is that your response? I commanded you! Oh, you twist my words, because you misunderstand my intentions. I don’t command, I entreat.”

“No, Monsieur, you command,” said Raoul stubbornly. “However you ask, your wish is to me a command. I will not see Mademoiselle de La Vallière again.”

“But that wounds you! You’re hurt!” said Athos.

Raoul made no reply.

“You’re pale, you’re distressed ... this feeling is strong, then!”

“It is a passion,” said Raoul.

“No—just a habit.”

“Monsieur, you know that I’ve been traveling a great deal, that I’ve spent two years away from her. A habit, why, in two years that would fade, I think ... but when I saw her again, I loved her, not more, that’s impossible, but still, and deeply. Mademoiselle de La Vallière is for me the woman beyond all other women—but to me, you are a god upon earth. For you, I’d sacrifice everything.”

“And that would be wrong,” said Athos. “I have no further rights over you. Age has emancipated you; you have no need of my consent. Besides, I wouldn’t refuse it after what you’ve just told me. Marry Mademoiselle de La Vallière, if that’s what you wish.”

Raoul started, but quickly said, “You’re very kind, Monsieur, and your concession warms me with gratitude—but I can’t accept it.”

“What, now you refuse?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“I won’t oppose you in anything, Raoul.”

“But in your heart, you do oppose this marriage. You would have me choose another.”

“That’s ... true.”

“That’s enough to forestall me. I will wait.”

“Take care, Raoul! What you’re saying is serious.”

“I’m aware of it, Monsieur. And I say, I will wait.”

“What? Until I die?” said Athos, dismayed.

“Oh, Monsieur!” cried Raoul, voice choking. “How can you tear my heart that way when I’ve never given you a single cause for complaint?”

“My dear boy, that’s true,” murmured Athos between his lips, trying to contain the emotion he could no longer suppress. “No, I don’t want to hurt you, I just don’t know what you expect. Do you think you’ll fall out of love with her?”

“No, never that, Monsieur. I’ll wait

... until you change your mind.”

“Then I’ll put it to the test, Raoul—and we shall see if Mademoiselle de La Vallière will wait as you do.”

“I hope so, Monsieur.”

“But, be warned, Raoul—she might not wait! Ah, you’re so young, so confident, so loyal ... but women are changeable.”

“You’ve never spoken ill of women to me before, Monsieur. You’ve never had cause to complain of them—why should you doubt Mademoiselle de La Vallière?”

“That’s true,” said Athos, looking away. “I’ve never spoken ill of women, never had reason to complain. Mademoiselle de La Vallière has done nothing to deserve suspicion—but when one looks to the future, one must consider exceptions, even improbabilities! What if, as I said, Mademoiselle de La Vallière doesn’t wait for you?”

“What do you mean, Monsieur?”

“What if she turned her eyes elsewhere?”

“Onto another man, you mean?”
said Raoul, suddenly pale.

“Just so.”

“Well, Monsieur! I’d kill that man,”
said Raoul simply, “and every other man Mademoiselle de La Vallière chooses, until one of them kills me or Mademoiselle de La Vallière comes back to me.”

Athos winced. “I thought you told me just now,” he said, voice strained, “that I was your god, your law in this world?”

“Oh!” said Raoul, trembling.
“Would you forbid me the right to duel?”

“What if I did forbid it, Raoul?”

“Then you would forbid me to hope, Monsieur. But you could not forbid me to die.”

Athos raised his eyes and looked searchingly at the viscount. He had

spoken these words in a dark tone and followed them with a darker look.

“Enough,” said Athos after a long silence. “This is a sad subject and we’ve carried it to extremes. Live life day by day, Raoul; do your duty, love Mademoiselle de La Vallière—in short, act like a man, since you’ve reached the age of manhood. But never forget that I love you dearly, as you say you love me as well.”

“Ah, Monsieur le Comte!” said Raoul, pressing Athos’s hand against his heart.

“My dear child. Leave me now, I need rest. By the way, Monsieur d’Artagnan has returned with me from England, and you owe him a visit.”

“With all my heart, Monsieur! I love Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“And rightly so: he’s an honest man and a brave cavalier.”

“Whom you love!” said Raoul.

“I do indeed. Do you know where to find him?”

“At *the Louvre*, 6 I expect, or the Palais Royal—wherever the king is. Doesn’t he still command *the King’s Musketeers?*” 7

“Not at the moment: Monsieur d’Artagnan took a leave of absence ... for his kind of vacation. No, don’t look for him at his old posts. You’ll find news of him at the house of *Planchet.*” 8

“His former lackey?”

“Who has become a grocer, yes.”

“Rue des Lombards, right?”

“Or Rue des Arcis, something like that.”

“I’ll find him, Monsieur, I’ll find him.”

“And you’ll give him a thousand compliments on my behalf and bring him to dine with me before I leave for La Fère.”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Bonsoir, Raoul!”

“Monsieur, I see you wear an order that’s new to me. Accept my compliments.”

“The Fleece? Ah, yes. A trifle, my son, the kind of bone they throw to an old dog like me. Bonsoir, Raoul!”

II

D'Artagnan's Lesson

Rd'Artagnan the next day, as he'd hoped. He encountered only Planchet, who was delighted to see the young man again, and paid him two or three warlike compliments that didn't sound like they'd come from a grocer. However, the next day, as Raoul was returning to Paris from Vincennes 9 at the head of fifty dragoons entrusted to him by Monsieur le Prince, he saw, on the Place Baudoyer, a man who, with his head cocked to the side, was

looking at a house the way a man looks at a horse he's considering buying. This man, dressed in a bourgeois suit buttoned up like a military coat, wearing a modest citizen's hat, but with a long shagreen-sheathed sword at his side, turned his head when he heard the horses and left off looking at the house to consider the dragoons. It was none other than Monsieur d'Artagnan, but d'Artagnan on foot, hands behind his back, reviewing the dragoons as they passed as closely as he'd reviewed the houses. Not a trooper, not a button or ribbon, not a horse's hoof escaped his inspection.

Raoul was riding at his column's flank, and d'Artagnan noticed him last. "Hey!" he called. "Eyes right!"

"Can it really be you?" said Raoul, turning his horse.

"No, you're not mistaken. Bonjour!" replied the former musketeer.

Raoul leaned down to shake his old friend's hand. "Watch it, Raoul," d'Artagnan said, "the second horse in

the fifth rank will be unshod before you reach Pont Marie; there are only two nails still holding it on in front."

"Wait for me," said Raoul, "I'll be right back."

"Can you leave your detachment?"

"My cornet can take over."

"Will you have dinner with me?"

"I sure will, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Then be quick, either leave your horse or get me one."

"I'd rather walk back with you."

Raoul hurried off to warn the cornet, who took his place in the vanguard, then he dismounted, gave his horse to one of the dragoons to lead, and ran happily back to take the arm of Monsieur d'Artagnan, who watched all this activity with the satisfaction of a connoisseur. "Have you come from Vincennes?" he said.

"Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"And Cardinal Mazarin...?"*

“He’s very sick; some even say he’s died.”

“Are you in good standing with Monsieur Fouquet?”* asked d’Artagnan, showing, with a disdainful shrug, how little moved he was by the death of Mazarin.

“With Monsieur Fouquet?” said Raoul. “I don’t know him.”

“Too bad, because a new king likes to elevate his own favorites.”

“Oh, the king has nothing against me!” replied the young man.

“I’m not talking about the man wearing the crown, but the king,” said d’Artagnan, “by which I mean Monsieur Fouquet, now that the cardinal is dead. You should get in good with Fouquet unless you want to model your life after mine ... though it’s true that you have other protectors, fortunately.”

“Monsieur le Prince, for one.”

“He’s yesterday’s news, my friend.”

“Monsieur le Comte de La Fère.”

“Athos? Oh, well, that’s different. If you want to make your fortune in England, you can’t do better. And I’ll tell you, without boasting too much, that I too have a little credit at the Court of Charles II. Now there’s a king, and no mistake!”

“Oh?” said Raoul, with the natural curiosity of a well-bred young man in the presence of courage and experience.

“Yes, a king who’s a pleasure-seeker, it’s true, but who knows how to hold a sword, and appreciates those who know what that’s good for. Athos stands well with Charles II. Take service with him and leave behind this crowd of tax-farmers and corrupt officials who steal with French fingers anything the Italian left behind. And leave that little crybaby of a king who will give us another reign like that of *François II*.
10 Have you studied history, Raoul?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier.”

“Then you know how François II always had an earache?”

“No, I didn’t know that.”

“And Charles IX always had a headache?”

“Oh?”

“And Henri III always had a stomachache?”

Raoul laughed.

“Well, my friend, Louis XIV* always has a heartache. It’s a sad sight to see a king who sighs from morning till night, never once shouting ‘Ventre-saint-gris!’ or ‘Corne de bœuf!’ like a man of spirit.”

“Is that why you left his service, Monsieur le Chevalier?” asked Raoul.

“Yes.”

“But then you yourself have burned your bridges, and now will never make your fortune.”

“Oh, me!” said d’Artagnan lightly. “I’m all set. I’ve had a legacy from

my family.”

Raoul just stared at him. The poverty of d’Artagnan was proverbial; Gascon to the core, his ill fortune out-Gasconed every other Gascon in the Kingdom of France and Navarre. Raoul had always heard the name d’Artagnan paired with that of Job, as close as Romulus with Remus.

D’Artagnan noticed this look of surprise. “Hmm. Did your father tell you I was with him in England?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier.”

“And that I had a lucky break there?”

“No, Monsieur, I don’t know anything about that.”

“Yes, a good friend was made a great lord, Viceroy of Scotland and Ireland, and he awarded me an estate.”

“An estate?”

“Of a decent size.”

“So, now you’re rich?”

“Eh!” d’Artagnan shrugged.

“Accept my sincere congratulations.”

“Thanks ... look, this is my house.”

“Here on *the Place de Grève?*” 11

“Yes. Don’t you like this neighborhood?”

“No, I do—you have a great view of the water. What a handsome old house!”

“Home of Our Lady’s Portrait, an old tavern that I’ve converted to a residence.”

“But isn’t the tavern still open?”

“Lord, yes!”

“So, you don’t live there?”

“No, I live at Planchet’s.”

“But didn’t you just say, ‘this is my house’?”

“I said that because it is my

house. I bought it.”

“Ah!” said Raoul.

“I bought it for thirty thousand *livres*, 12 but it’ll earn me ten per cent a year, my dear Raoul—a fine return indeed! It has a garden on the Rue de la Mortellerie, the tavern rents the first two floors for a thousand a month, and the attic goes for five hundred.”

“You’re jesting!”

“Word of honor.”

“An attic for five hundred *livres*? But it’s too small to live in.”

“So, no one lives in it. Only, you see that the attic has two windows overlooking the square?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Well! Whenever there’s a hanging, quartering, or breaking on the wheel, those two windows rent for twenty pistoles apiece.”

“Oh!” said Raoul with horror.

“Revolting, isn’t it?” said d’Artagnan.

“Oh!” repeated Raoul.

“It’s disgusting, but there it is. Parisian spectators can be real cannibals. I don’t see how Christian men can make money from such a thing.”

“Truly.”

“As for me,” continued d’Artagnan, “if I lived in that house, I’d shut it up tight on execution days—but I don’t live there.”

“But don’t you rent out the attic for five hundred livres?”

“Only to that animal of an innkeeper, who then sublets it. Anyway, that’s how it brings in fifteen hundred livres a month.”

“Five per cent, the natural return on investment,” said Raoul.

“Exactly. And I still have the storerooms at the back of the house, plus the cooling cellars, which flood

every winter, and the garden, which is quite pretty, well planted and very private under the shadow of the walls and gate of the adjoining church, Saint Gervais and Saint Protais. The garden brings thirteen hundred livres.”

“Thirteen hundred livres! That’s a princely sum.”

“Here’s the story: it rents to a canon of the church—these canons are all as rich as Croesus—whom I suspect employs the garden for private frolics. The tenant rents it under the name Monsieur Godard, which is either a true name or a false one. If it’s true, then there’s our canon; if it’s false, then who knows? And why should I care, since he always pays in advance?

“Now, when you came by, I was considering the idea of buying, on Place Baudoyer there, a house that adjoins my garden to make a handsome combined property. But your dragoons distracted me. Here, let’s go up the Rue de la Vannerie,

it'll take us straight to Master Planchet's."

D'Artagnan marched on and led Raoul to Planchet's, inside and up to a room that the grocer had ceded to his former master. Planchet was out, but dinner was served and ready. There was in this grocer still a touch of military punctuality.

D'Artagnan returned to the subject of Raoul's future. "Does your father keep you within strict limits?" he said.

"Mostly, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"Yes, I imagine Athos is fair but rather strict."

"But generous as a king, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"In that case, lad, your money must be tight indeed! But if you ever need a few extra pistoles, your old musketeer is here."

"Ah, dear Monsieur d'Artagnan...."

"Do you gamble at all?"

“Never.”

“But you try your luck with women? ...Ah, you blush—you little Aramis,* you! My friend, that will cost you more than cards and dice. Though with gambling, we often fight when we lose, and that’s some compensation. Bah! That little crybaby king makes winners give him a chance at revenge. What a reign, my poor Raoul, what a reign! To think that in our day we musketeers were often besieged in our houses, like Hector and Priam in the city of Troy, and then the women wept, and we laughed, and five hundred rabble beat their hands together and cried, ‘Kill them!’ But they daren’t touch a musketeer. Mordieux! You won’t see days like that.”

“You’re very hard on the king, Monsieur d’Artagnan, though you barely know him.”

“I, barely know him? Listen, Raoul, day by day, hour by hour—mark my words!—I can predict exactly what he’ll do. Now that the cardinal’s dead,

he'll worry—which isn't the silliest thing he could do, especially if he doesn't weep about it."

"And then?"

"Then he'll beg a salary from Monsieur Fouquet and go to *Fontainebleau* 13 where he'll compose verses to some Mancini or other, whom the young queen will terrorize. You see, she's Spanish, the new queen, like her mother-in-law Madame Anne of Austria.* I know them, the Spaniards of the House of Austria."

"And then?"

"Then, having clipped the silver ribbons from the *Swiss Guard* 14 because they were too expensive, he'll dismount the musketeers and put them on foot because hay for horses costs five sous apiece every day."

"Oh, don't say that!"

"What do I care? I'm not a musketeer, am I? Whether they're on

horse or afoot, and armed with a sword, a larding pin, or nothing at all, what do I care?"

"Dear Monsieur d'Artagnan, I beg you, please don't speak any more ill of the king. I'm practically in his service, and my father would be upset with me for hearing, even from your mouth, anything that would offend His Majesty."

"Your father, eh? Yes, he's the knight errant for every lost cause. Pardieu! Brave as a Caesar, of course, but a man of poor judgment."

"Oh, fine!" said Raoul, laughing. "Now you'll even speak ill of my father, whom you call the great Athos! You're in a foul mood today, and I think wealth makes you as sour as poverty does to others."

"You're right, by God! I'm a cranky old coot in my dotage, a petulant old man. I'm a tent cord unraveled, a cuirass with a hole in it, a boot missing a heel and a spur without a rowel. But listen, just say one thing for me."

“What would that be, Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“Just say, ‘Mazarin was a peasant.’”

“But he’s probably dead!”

“All the more reason! I did say was. If I didn’t think he was dead, I’d have said, ‘Mazarin is a peasant.’ Now come on, say it for my sake.”

“All right, I suppose.”

“Say it!”

“Mazarin was a peasant,” said Raoul, smiling at the musketeer, now as cheerful as in the old days.

“All right,” said the latter, “that was my first proposition, and here’s the conclusion. Repeat after me, Raoul: ‘But I’m going to miss him.’”

“Chevalier!”

“You don’t want to say it? Then I’ll say it for you: but I’m going to miss Mazarin.”

They were still laughing at this

recitation of propositions when one of the shop boys came in. "A letter, Monsieur," he said, "for Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Thank you ... what!" cried the musketeer.

"The handwriting of Monsieur le Comte," said Raoul.

"Yes, it is." D'Artagnan tore it open. "'Dear Friend,' says Athos, 'I just received a request on behalf of the king to send for you....' Me?" said d'Artagnan, and he let the paper fall onto the table.

Raoul picked it up and continued to read it aloud: "'Make haste. His Majesty wants to see you and awaits you at the Louvre.'"

"Me?" the musketeer repeated.

"Oh ho!" laughed Raoul.

"Oh, no," replied d'Artagnan. "What can this mean?"

III

The King

H surprise passed, d'Artagnan read the note from Athos again. "It's strange for the king to summon me," he said. *is first moment of*

"Why?" said Raoul. "Don't you think, Monsieur, that the king misses a servant like you?"

"Ho ho!" laughed the officer, though through his teeth. "You throw my words back at me, Master Raoul. If the king missed me, he'd never have let me go. No, no, I see something more here—or less, if you like."

“Or less! What, then, Monsieur le Chevalier?”

“You are young, you are confident and optimistic ... how I’d love to be that way again! To be twenty-four, your brain occupied by thoughts of nothing by women, love, and good prospects. Ah, Raoul! Wait until you’ve received kings’ smiles and queens’ secrets, until you’ve had two cardinals shot out from under you, one a tiger, the other a fox, wait until—but what’s the point of this blather? We must part, Raoul!”

“How you say that! Why so solemn?”

“Eh, because the situation warrants it. Listen to me; this is important.”

“I’m listening, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“You must inform your father of my departure.”

“Your departure?”

“By God, yes! You must tell him

that I've gone to England to take up residence in my house there."

"You, go to England? But what about the king's orders?"

"Don't be so naïve. Do you imagine that I'm going to report to the Louvre and put myself in the power of that little crowned wolf-cub?"

"Wolf-cub! The king? Are you mad, Monsieur le Chevalier?"

"On the contrary, I've never been so sane. Don't you know what he wants with me, this worthy son of *Louis the Just?* ¹⁵ Mordieux, this is politics—he wants me in *the Bastille*, ¹⁶ sure and simple."

"The Bastille? For what?" cried Raoul, suddenly terrified.

"For what I said to him on a certain day in Blois. I was angry, and he hasn't forgotten."

"What did you say to him?"

"I told him he was selfish, cowardly, and a fool."

“Good God!” said Raoul. “Is it possible such words came out of your mouth?”

“Not those words exactly, perhaps, but that was the gist of it.”

“But the king would have had you arrested right then!”

“By who? I was the commander of the musketeers; I would have had to order myself to be taken to prison, and I would have resisted arresting myself. And then I was off to England, so no more d’Artagnan. But now the cardinal is dead, or as good as, and my return to Paris is known, so they put the grab on me.”

“The cardinal protected you?”

“The cardinal knew me and knew what I was good for—and I knew him. We respected each other. But now, before confiding his soul to the devil, he’ll have advised Anne of Austria to have me safely put away. Go tell your father I’ve gone, and adieu!”

“No, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said

Raoul with dismay, after glancing out the window. "You're not going anywhere."

"Why is that?"

"Because there's an officer of the Swiss waiting for you below."

"So?"

"So, he'll arrest you!"

D'Artagnan burst out in Homeric laughter.

"Oh, I know you'll resist him, you'll fight him, you'll even beat him—but then that's rebellion, and as an officer yourself, that's a line you can't cross."

"Devil child! You and your logic!" growled d'Artagnan.

"But I'm right, aren't I?"

"Yes. So instead of going down into the street where this simpleton is waiting for me, I'll duck out the back. I have a horse in the stable, a good one, too; I'll ride him to death,

since I can afford to do that now, and by killing horse after horse, I can reach Boulogne in eleven hours. I certainly know the way ... just tell your father one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“That ... that a certain thing he knows about is hidden at Planchet’s, except for a fifth of it, and that....”

“But, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, if you run, there’ll be talk about you that you won’t care for.”

“Such as?”

“First of all, they’ll say you were scared.”

“Oh? Who will say that?”

“The king, for one.”

“Well! That’s no more than the truth. I am scared.”

“Second, they’ll say you must be guilty.”

“Guilty of what?”

“Whatever crimes they accuse you of.”

“Probably still true. So, you advise me to get thrown into the Bastille?”

“That’s what the Comte de La Fère would tell you.”

“God’s own truth!” said d’Artagnan, considering. “You’re right, I won’t run for it. But what if they do throw me in the Bastille?”

“Oh, we’ll get you out,” said Raoul with absolute confidence.

“God’s death!” said d’Artagnan, gripping his hand. “I like the way you said that, Raoul—it’s pure Athos, through and through. All right, I’ll obey. Don’t forget my final words.”

“All but a fifth,” said Raoul.

“Indeed, you’re a fine lad, so let me add something to that.”

“Say it!”

“It’s that, if you don’t get me out of the Bastille and I die in there—oh,

it could happen! I'd be a terrible prisoner, you know. Anyway, in that event, I leave three fifths to you and one fifth to your father."

"Chevalier!"

"And if you want to pay to have some masses said for me, feel free. Mordieux!"

That said, d'Artagnan put on his baldric, hung his sword from it, picked out a hat with a fresh feather, and extended his hand to Raoul, who threw himself into his arms.

On his way out through the store he glanced at the shop-boys, who were watching the scene with a mixture of pride and anxiety. Scooping up a handful of Corinthian raisins, he strolled out toward the officer, who was waiting philosophically at the door of the shop.

"That face! Can it be you, Herr Friedisch?" said the musketeer cheerfully. "So, now we arrest our friends?"

“Arrested!” whispered the shop-boys to each other.

“Ja, it’s me,” said the Swiss. “Pon jour, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Should I give you my sword? I warn you, it’s long and heavy. Let me keep it till we get to the Louvre; I feel awkward walking the streets without a sword, and you’ll be even more awkward with two.”

“Der könig said nothing about that,” replied the Swiss, “so taking it yourself.”

“Well, that’s very kind of the king. Let’s be on our way.”

Herr Friedisch wasn’t much of a talker, and d’Artagnan had too much to think about to chat. It wasn’t far from Planchet’s shop to the Louvre, and they were there within ten minutes. By then night had fallen. Friedisch wanted to go in the grand entryway, but d’Artagnan said, “No, that’s the long way around; let’s take *the King’s Little Stair.*” 17

The Swiss did as he asked and escorted d'Artagnan up to the vestibule outside Louis XIV's study. Once there, he saluted his prisoner and, without a word, left to return to his duty post.

D'Artagnan scarcely had time to wonder why his sword hadn't been taken from him when the study door opened and a valet de chambre announced, "Monsieur d'Artagnan!" The musketeer marched in as if on parade, face calm but mustache bristling.

The king was sitting at his desk and writing. He didn't stop when the musketeer's footsteps sounded on the parquet floor—didn't even turn his head. D'Artagnan advanced to the middle of the room, and then, seeing that the king wasn't paying any attention to him, and realizing that this was a pretense, a sort of cold preamble to the interrogation he was expecting, he turned his back on the prince and began to run his eyes over the frescoes lining the upper wall and the cracks above in the ceiling. This

maneuver was accompanied by the following inner monologue: So, you wish to humble me—me, who served you since you were an infant, as if you were my own child, as if you were God himself—that is, for nothing. Just wait, then, and you'll see how a man behaves who's been under fire from the Huguenots and has tugged on the beard of the cardinal—the true cardinal!

Louis XIV turned at that moment. "Are you there, Monsieur d'Artagnan?" he said.

D'Artagnan imitated him and turned as well. "Yes, Sire," he said.

"Good, wait a moment while I finish adding this up."

D'Artagnan said nothing, only bowed. That's polite enough, . I can hardly complain about that.

Louis underlined something with a violent stroke and then threw down his pen. Go ahead, work yourself up into a fury, thought the musketeer. That just puts me more at ease. I

didn't fire off all my shot on that day in Blois, as you'll find out.

Louis rose, drew a hand across his forehead, and then stepped forward to face d'Artagnan, giving him a look imperious yet benevolent.

What does he want with me? thought the musketeer. Come on, get it over with.

"Monsieur," said the king, "you've heard by now that the cardinal is dead?"

"Indeed, Sire."

"And so, you know that I'm now the master in my house?"

"That's not something that dates from the death of the cardinal, Sire; a man is master in his house whenever he decides to act like it."

"Yes—but do you remember what you told me in Blois?"

Now we come to it, thought d'Artagnan. I wasn't wrong. Well, all the better! That shows my wits

haven't gone entirely astray.

"You have nothing to say to me?"
said Louis.

"Sire, I think I recall...."

"You only think so?"

"It's been a while."

"If you don't remember, I certainly do. Here's what you told me, so listen carefully."

"I'm all ears, Sire, as this is a conversation I'm sure to find interesting."

Louis paused to look again at the musketeer, who, holding his hat in one hand, stroked its feather with the other, and then turned up the ends of his mustache.

Louis XIV continued, "You left my service, Monsieur, after telling me what you thought, did you not?"

"Yes, Sire."

"That is, after giving me your opinion about my ways of thinking

and acting. There's merit in that. You started out by telling me that you'd been serving my family for thirty-four years, and you were tired."

"I said that, yes, Sire."

"And then you admitted that this exhaustion was only a pretext, and the real cause was discontent."

"I was discontented, it's true—but this discontent was never apparent, as far as I know, and if, as a man of spirit, I spoke out before Your Majesty, I never even thought those things in front of anyone else."

"No need for excuses, d'Artagnan, just listen to what I have to say. After reproaching me with your discontent, I answered you with a promise—I said, 'Wait.' Isn't that true?"

"Yes, Sire, as true as what I said."

"And you replied to me, 'Wait? No; right now, right away!' Make no excuses, I tell you—it was natural. But you had no compassion for your prince, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

“Sire! Compassion for a king from a poor soldier?”

“You know very well what I’m talking about; you knew I was in need of it. You understood that I wasn’t yet the master, that my hope was in the future. But you responded to me, when I spoke of that future, ‘Give me my leave, and right away!’”

D’Artagnan chewed on his mustache. “That’s true,” he murmured.

“You failed to serve me when I was in distress,” said Louis XIV.

“But,” said d’Artagnan, looking up with a certain nobility, “if I didn’t continue to serve Your Majesty, neither have I betrayed him. I’d shed my blood for nothing; I watched at the door like a dog, knowing I’d never be thrown a bone. But though I had nothing, I asked for nothing from Your Majesty but my leave.”

“I know you’re a good man, but I was young, and you spared me nothing. And what did you have to

reproach your king for? Because he didn't help Charles II? Or more to the point: because he didn't marry *Mademoiselle de Mancini*?" 18 And saying this, he fixed the musketeer with a penetrating look.

Ahh! thought the latter. The devil! He does more than just remember, he guesses.

"Your sentence fell on the king, but also on the man," continued Louis XIV. "But, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that weakness—you regarded it as a weakness, didn't you?"

D'Artagnan made no response.

"You reproached me also in regard to the late cardinal, but didn't Monsieur le Cardinal raise and support me? In the act raising and supporting himself, I'm well aware, but still, I benefited from it. An ingrate or an egotist, which would you have preferred me to be, to serve me?"

"Sire...."

“Don’t answer that, Monsieur—it would only cause you regret and me further pain.”

D’Artagnan wasn’t convinced. The young king, by adopting a haughty tone with him, hadn’t made his case.

“Have you considered, then?” continued Louis XIV.

“About what, Sire?” asked d’Artagnan politely.

“About all that I’ve said to you, Monsieur.”

“Yes, Sire, certainly....”

“And you’re just waiting for the right moment before retracting your words?”

“Sire....”

“You hesitate, it seems to me.”

“I don’t understand quite what Your Majesty has the honor to tell me.”

Louis frowned.

“Pardon me, Sire, but my mind is rather thick, and things penetrate into it only with difficulty ... though it’s true that once they get in there, they stay.”

“Yes, you seem to have a good memory.”

“Almost as good as Your Majesty’s.”

“Then give me a quick summary, as my time is valuable. What have you been doing with your leave?”

“Raising my ransom, Sire.”

“A crude way to put it, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“Your Majesty may think so, certainly. I have nothing but respect for the king, and if I speak crudely, after a life spent in the camps and the barracks, His Majesty is too far above me to take offense at the blunt speech of a soldier.”

“In fact, I know that you pulled off a brilliant affair in England, Monsieur. I only regret that you broke your

promise thereby.”

“Me?” cried d’Artagnan.

“No doubt about it. You pledged to serve no other prince once you left my service—but it was for King Charles II that you planned the amazing abduction of Monsieur Monck.”

“On the contrary, Sire, I did it for myself.”

“And did you succeed?”

“Like the mercenary captains of the fifteenth century, with a surprise attack.”

“What do you call success? A fortune?”

“A hundred thousand crowns, Sire, in my possession. It was, in one week, three times what I’d made in the previous fifty years.”

“A round sum indeed—but you’re ambitious, are you not?”

“Me, Sire? A quarter of that seems

a treasure to me, and I swear I have no thought of increasing it."

"Ah! You plain to remain idle?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Give up the sword?"

"I've already done it."

"Impossible, Monsieur d'Artagnan," Louis said firmly.

"But, Sire...."

"Well?"

"Why?"

"Because I don't wish it!" said the young prince in a voice so grave and imperious that d'Artagnan started in surprise, and some anxiety.

"Will Your Majesty allow me a response?" he asked.

"Speak."

"I made my resolution when I was poor and destitute."

"Indeed. And after?"

“Now that, by my efforts, I’ve acquired some wealth, would Your Majesty take from me my freedom? Would Your Majesty condemn me to labor for what I’ve already earned?”

“Who gave you the right, Monsieur, to question my plans or define my purview?” replied Louis testily. “Who told you what I can do, and what you can do with yourself?”

“Sire,” the musketeer said calmly, “it seems to me that frankness no longer orders our conversation, as it did on the day we cleared the air in Blois.”

“No, Monsieur; everything is changed.”

“I offer Your Majesty my sincere congratulations, but....”

“But you don’t believe it?”

“I’m not great statesman, but I keep my eye on affairs, Sire, and I can’t say I see things as Your Majesty does. The reign of Mazarin is over, but that of the financiers now begins.

They have all the money, and Your Majesty won't see much of it. To live under the jaws of these hungry wolves will be hard for a man who'd hoped for independence."

Just then someone scratched at the study door, and the king raised his head proudly. "Excuse me, Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said, "but Monsieur Colbert* has come to make his report. Come in, Monsieur Colbert."

D'Artagnan stepped back into a corner. Colbert entered, papers in his hand, and approached the king. It goes without saying that the Gascon didn't lose the opportunity to give this newcomer a close inspection.

"Is the inquiry complete?" the king asked Colbert.

"Yes, Sire."

"And the conclusion of the magistrates?"

"Is that the accused merit confiscation and death."

“Ah,” said the king impassively, but with a glance at d’Artagnan. “And your opinion, Monsieur Colbert?” the king asked.

Colbert looked at d’Artagnan in his turn. That intimidating figure froze the words on his lips. Louis XIV understood. “Don’t worry,” he said, “this is Monsieur d’Artagnan; surely you recognize Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

The two men regarded each other for a moment, d’Artagnan’s bold eye open and almost challenging, Colbert’s eyes half-closed, his expression veiled. The frank bravura of the first nettled the second, while the calculating caution of the financier irritated the soldier. “Ah!” said Colbert. “Monsieur is he who achieved that brilliant coup in England.” And he bowed slightly to d’Artagnan.

“Ah!” said the Gascon. “Monsieur is he who trimmed the silver from the ribbons of the Swiss—a brilliant exploit of thrift!” And he bowed deeply.

The financier had thought to put the musketeer in his place, but the musketeer had upstaged the financier.

“Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said the king, who hadn’t caught all the nuances of the exchange, none of which would have escaped Mazarin. “The accused are corrupt tax-farmers who have robbed me, have been caught, and whom I will sentence to death.”

D’Artagnan started. “Oh!” he said.

“You have something to say?”

“Nothing, Sire; this is no business of mine.”

The king was already holding the pen and applying it to the paper.

“Sire,” said Colbert in a low voice, “I must warn Your Majesty that though an example is necessary, these executions will be troublesome.”

“Explain,” said Louis XIV.

“It must be taken into account,” Colbert continued calmly, “that to accuse these traitors is to accuse the Office of the Superintendent. These two culprits in particular are friends of a powerful personage, and the hanging of such, when they’d usually just serve a brief and comfortable confinement in the Châtelet, is bound to cause trouble.”

Louis flushed and turned to d’Artagnan, who gnawed lightly at his mustache, and not without a smile of pity for the financier, but also for the king, who had to listen to him.

Then Louis seized the pen and, with a rapid movement of his trembling hand, affixed his signature to the bottoms of the two papers, presented them to Colbert, and then said, looking him in the face, “Monsieur Colbert, when you speak to me of affairs, leave out any mention of mere trouble—and as for the word impossible, never use it.”

Colbert bowed, hurt and humiliated at have been given a

lesson in front of the musketeer. He turned to leave, but then, eager to repair his mistake, he said, “I forgot to announce to Your Majesty that the confiscations come to five million livres.”

That’s not bad, thought d’Artagnan.

“Which makes my total assets...?” asked the king.

“Eighteen million livres, Sire,” replied Colbert with a bow.

“Mordioux!” d’Artagnan grunted. “That’s lovely!”

“Monsieur Colbert,” added the king, “on your way out, please cross the gallery where *Monsieur de Lyonne* 19 is waiting and ask him to bring me the document I ordered him to draw up.”

“Right away, Sire. Has Your Majesty any further need of me this evening?”

“No, Monsieur; adieu!”

“Let’s return to our business, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” said Louis XIV,

as if nothing had happened. “You see that, as for money, the situation is considerably changed.”

“From zero to eighteen million,” replied the musketeer cheerily. “Ah, that’s what Your Majesty would have needed on the day Charles II came to Blois. The two states wouldn’t be at odds today, for I must say that there I see a stumbling block.”

“In that I think you’re unjust, Monsieur,” Louis replied, “for if Providence had allowed me to give my brother a million on that day, you wouldn’t have left my service and made your fortune, as you just explained. But there’s more good news to relate, as my relations with England are in no state to worry you.”

The valet de chambre entered, interrupting the king, to announce Monsieur de Lyonne. “Come in, Monsieur,” said the king. “You’re punctual—I like that in a servant. Let me see the letter to my brother Charles II.”

D’Artagnan pricked up his ears.

“One moment, Monsieur,” Louis said nonchalantly to the Gascon. “I must send to London my consent to the marriage of my brother Philippe,* Monsieur le Duc d’Orléans, with Lady Henrietta Stuart, sister of King Charles.”

“He certainly is knocking me about,” murmured d’Artagnan, while the king signed the letter and dismissed Monsieur de Lyonne, “but, my faith, the more he knocks me about this way, the better I like it.”

The king followed Monsieur de Lyonne with his eyes until the door was shut behind him; he even took three steps as if to follow his minister, but stopped, paused, and returned to the musketeer. “Now, Monsieur,” he said, “let’s wrap this up. You told me that day in Blois that you weren’t wealthy?”

“I am now, Sire.”

“Yes, but that doesn’t concern me—that’s money you earned on your account, not mine.”

“I don’t really understand what Your Majesty is trying to tell me.”

“All right, since you mean to drag the words out of me, answer this, then: will you take twenty thousand livres a year, in cash, as your salary?”

“But, Sire...” said d’Artagnan, eyes widening.

“Add in four horses furnished and maintained, plus repayment of all expenses as they arise—or would you rather have forty thousand without expenses? Tell me.”

“Sire ... Your Majesty....”

“Yes, you’re surprised, that’s natural, and I expected it—but answer me, or I’ll think you no longer have the quick wits I’ve always appreciated in you.”

“Sire, twenty thousand livres a year is a fair salary, a fine sum, but....”

“No buts. Yes or no: is this an honorable offer?”

“Oh, certainly....”

“Then you’re satisfied! Well and good. You’d really be better off reckoning the expenses separately, but you can arrange all that with Colbert. Now, let’s move on to more important matters.”

“But, Sire, I told Your Majesty....”

“That you want to rest, I’m well aware of it. But I told you that’s not what I want. I am the master here, aren’t I?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“All right, then. Now, you were on your way to becoming Captain of the Musketeers?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“Well! Here is your signed promotion. I’ll just put it in this drawer. The day you return from a certain mission I shall entrust to you, you can take this promotion out yourself.”

D’Artagnan looked down,

hesitating.

“Come, Monsieur,” said the king, “am I to think you don’t know that at the Court of the Most Christian King the *Captain-Lieutenant of Musketeers* 20 outranks all the Marshals of France?”

“I know it, Sire.”

“Then, am I to take it that you don’t trust my word?”

“Oh, Sire, never that!”

“I wanted to prove to you that you, a good servant, had lost a good master. Am I, now, more like the master you required?”

“I begin to think so, Sire.”

“Then, Monsieur, you will resume your duties. Your company has declined since you left, the men swaggering about and fighting in the taverns, despite my edicts and those of my father. You will restore discipline to the company as soon as possible.”

“Yes, Sire.”

“You will not leave me again.”

“Fine.”

“You will march with me when the army marches, and camp beside my tent.”

“Well, Sire,” said d’Artagnan, “if all you want from me is that kind of service, there’s no point in paying me twenty thousand livres a year; I’ll scarcely earn it.”

“I wish you to maintain a proper household; I wish you to entertain at your table; I want my Captain of Musketeers to be person of consequence.”

“And I don’t like found money,” said d’Artagnan abruptly. “I prefer to earn it! Your Majesty offers me an idle living that any officer you choose would perform for four thousand livres.”

“Ever the Gascon, Monsieur d’Artagnan. Of course, there’s more to it than that, and I see I must reveal

my secret.”

“What! Your Majesty has a secret?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“That’s different! In that case, I accept the twenty thousand, for I can keep a secret, and discretion is priceless. Would Your Majesty care to share it now?”

“Grab your boots, Monsieur d’Artagnan, and saddle your horse.”

“Right now?”

“Within two days.”

“That’s as well, Sire, because I have affairs to settle before I depart, especially if the matter might come to blows.”

“It very well might.”

“I can handle that. But, Sire, you’ve addressed pay, and promotion, and you’ve spoken to d’Artagnan’s heart, but there’s one thing you forgot.”

“What’s that?”

“You didn’t address my vanity; when will I be a knight of a royal order?”

“That matters to you?”

“Well, yes. My friend Athos is encrusted with orders, and I’m envious.”

“You’ll be knighted at my command one month after your promotion to captain.”

“Ah!” said the officer thoughtfully. “After the mission.”

“Exactly.”

“Where is Your Majesty sending me, then?”

“Do you know Brittany?”

“No, Sire.”

“Any friends there?”

“In Brittany? Faith, no!”

“All the better. Are you familiar with fortifications?”

D'Artagnan smiled. "You could say that, Sire."

"That is, you can tell a full fortress from a mere fortified château, such as we allow to our vassals?"

"I would no more mistake a fort for a rampart than I would confuse a cuirass with a pie crust. Will that do, Sire?"

"Yes, Monsieur. Then that's where you'll go."

"To Brittany?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Completely alone. In this case, you can't even take a lackey."

"May I ask Your Majesty why?"

"Because, Monsieur, you may find it useful to assume the guise of a servant of a noble house. Your face is well known in France, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"And then, Sire?"

“And then you will travel through Brittany and carefully examine the region’s fortifications.”

“Along the coast?”

“And the isles.”

“Ah!”

“You will begin with *Belle-Île-en-Mer*.” 21

“Meaning with Monsieur Fouquet?” said d’Artagnan in a serious tone and giving Louis XIV a significant look.

“I believe you’re right, Monsieur—Belle-Île does, in fact, belong to Monsieur Fouquet.”

“Then Your Majesty wishes me to determine if Belle-Île is being fortified?”

“Yes.”

“If the fortifications are new or old?”

“Precisely.”

“And if by chance the

superintendent's retainers are numerous enough to form a garrison?"

"That's exactly what I wish, Monsieur—you've put your finger on it."

"And if it isn't being fortified, Sire?"

"You will travel around Brittany, keeping your eyes and ears open."

D'Artagnan twisted his mustache. "So, I'm a king's spy," he said slowly.

"No, Monsieur."

"Pardon, but it seems so, Sire, since I'm spying on behalf of Your Majesty."

"This is a scouting mission, Monsieur. Would you lead your musketeers, sword in hand, toward an unknown enemy's position?"

At these last words d'Artagnan flinched imperceptibly.

"Do you still think you're a spy?"

continued the king.

“No,” said d’Artagnan thoughtfully, “the nature of it changes when we’re scouting an enemy; then we’re just acting the soldier. And if Belle-Île is being fortified?” he quickly added.

“You will acquire an exact plan of the fortifications.”

“Will I be able to get in?”

“That’s not my affair, that’s your business. Didn’t you hear me offer you an extra twenty thousand livres a year if you want it?”

“All right, Sire. But what if no fortification is under way?”

“You’ll come home quietly with a well-rested horse.”

“Sire, I’m ready.”

“You start tomorrow by going to the superintendent’s estate to call for the first quarter of the salary I’m paying you. Do you know Monsieur Fouquet?”

“Not well, Sire, but I should say to Your Majesty that it doesn’t seem important that I meet him.”

“Not so, Monsieur, because he’ll refuse you the money I want you to demand, and that refusal is what I’m waiting for.”

“Ah!” said d’Artagnan. “And afterwards, Sire?”

“Once your salary is refused, you’ll go and get it from Monsieur Colbert. By the way, do you have a good horse?”

“An excellent one, Sire.”

“How much did you pay for it?”

“One hundred fifty pistoles.”

“I’ll buy it from you. Here are two hundred pistoles.”

“But I’ll need a horse to travel, Sire.”

“Well?”

“Well! You just bought mine from me.”

“Not at all—on the contrary, I give it to you. Only, now that he’s mine rather than yours, I’m sure you won’t spare him.”

“Your Majesty is in haste?”

“Great haste.”

“Why should I wait two days, then?”

“Two reasons that concern me.”

“That’s different. The horse can make up the two days in the first week, and after that there’s the post.”

“No, using the post is too obvious, Monsieur d’Artagnan. Go, keep a low profile, and remember you belong to me.”

“Sire, I’ve never forgotten it! At what time, the day after tomorrow, shall I take my leave of Your Majesty?”

“Where are you living?”

“Henceforth I live at the Louvre.”

“Not at the moment. Keep your

lodging in town and I'll pay for it. As for your departure, it should be at night, since you must leave unseen by anyone—or if seen, without anyone knowing you're traveling for me. Keep silent, Monsieur."

"Your Majesty spoils everything that's been said by giving such an order."

"I must ask where you're staying, because I can't always send for you through the Comte de La Fère."

"I'm staying with Monsieur Planchet, grocer, Rue des Lombards, under the sign of the Golden Pestle."

"Go out very little, show yourself less, and wait for my orders."

"Yet I must go out some, Sire."

"That's true, but only to the superintendent's; where so many others go, you can lose yourself among the crowd."

"I'll need a note to draw the salary, Sire."

“Here it is.” The king signed it.

D’Artagnan looked it over to make sure it was in order. “That’s real money,” he said, “or at least the paper for it.”

“Adieu, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” the king added. “I think you understand me now?”

“I understand that Your Majesty sends me to Belle-Île-en-Mer, that’s all.”

“To find out?”

“To find out what Monsieur Fouquet is building—that’s all.”

“Good. What if you’re captured?”

“I admit no such possibility,” replied the Gascon boldly.

“What if you’re killed?”

“Not likely, Sire.”

“In the first case, say nothing; in the second case, make sure you have nothing written down.”

D'Artagnan shrugged and took his leave of the king without ceremony, saying to himself, "The English rain continues! Let's stay under the downspout."

IV

The

Houses of

Monsieur

Fouquet

A returning to Planchet's house, his head bursting with recent events and new responsibilities, d'Artagnan was another sort was taking place, though it wasn't all that different from the conversation between the musketeer

and the king. But this scene took place outside Paris in a house owned by Superintendent Fouquet in the village of *Saint-Mandé*. 22 The minister had just arrived at this country house followed by his first clerk, who carried an enormous portfolio full of papers, some to examine and others to sign. As it was about five o'clock in the evening, the masters had already dined, and supper was being prepared for twenty lesser guests. The superintendent didn't pause upon alighting from his carriage; he hastened in through the front door, crossed the antechambers and reached his office, where he declared he was shutting himself in to work and no one was to disturb him for anything less than an order from the king. After giving this command, Fouquet closed the door behind him, and two footmen took their places as sentries at his door.

Inside, Fouquet threw a bolt that slid a panel across the entry, which prevented anything that took place in his office from being seen or heard. Surprisingly, Fouquet then began to

follow through on his announcement, for he went straight to his desk, sat down, opened the portfolio, and began to sort through the enormous stack of papers it contained. After taking these precautions not to be disturbed, he'd been at work no more than ten minutes when he heard repeated knocks, equally spaced, which seemed to attract his attention. Fouquet raised his head, cocked his ear, and listened. The knocking continued.

Then the minister arose, with a slight gesture of impatience, and walked straight to a mirror from which the knocking emanated, whether by hand or unseen mechanism. It was a tall mirror set in a wall panel. Three other identical mirrors were placed symmetrically around the office walls. Nothing distinguished this one from the others, but doubtless the taps from behind it were a signal, and as Fouquet approached it, listening, the sound of evenly spaced rapping resumed. "Oh ho!" murmured the superintendent in surprise. "Who can

be there? I wasn't expecting anyone today."

Then, apparently in response to the signal, the superintendent three times pulled and released a golden knob on the mirror's mounting. Then he returned to his desk, sat back down, and said, "Faith, let them wait."

And, plunging himself back into the ocean of paper stacked in waves before him, he seemed to think of nothing but work. In fact, with incredible rapidity and marvelous clarity, Fouquet reviewed the longest reports, correcting and annotating them with pen flying, and, carried away as if by a fever, the work melted away before him, signatures, calculations, and notations made as if ten clerks at once, with a hundred fingers and ten brains, were doing the work instead of a single man. The only pause was when, from time to time, Fouquet looked up from his work to glance at a clock placed on the desk before him. The reason for this was that Fouquet had set himself the task of one hour's work, setting

out to accomplish in that time what another would finish in an entire day. And so long as he wasn't disturbed, he felt confident of achieving that goal.

But in the midst of this furious work, the regular taps from behind the mirror came again, more hurried this time, and therefore sounding more urgent. "Come, it seems the lady is impatient," said Fouquet. "Calmly now, let's see: it must be the countess. But no, the countess is at Rambouillet for three days. Madame Présidente, then. Ah, but La Présidente wouldn't presume to be so insistent, she'd knock humbly and then await my good pleasure. I don't know who it can be—but I know who it can't be, and since it isn't the marquise, devil take the others!"

And he continued his work, despite the repeated calls of the knocker. However, after another quarter of an hour, impatience conquered Fouquet at last. He raced through the remainder of his work, stuffed the papers back in the portfolio, and

glaring at the mirror, whence the rapping came more urgently than ever, he said, "Oh! What's the source of this passion? What's happened, and who's the *Ariadne* 23 tugging so impatiently at that thread? Let's find out."

And he pushed with the tip of his finger on a knob parallel to the one he'd pulled earlier. Immediately the mirror pivoted like a door, opening to reveal a deep closet into which the superintendent disappeared, as if into a magic box. Inside, he pushed another knob, which opened, not a wooden panel, but a slab of the wall, and he passed through this new doorway, leaving it to close itself behind him.

Fouquet then descended about twenty steps down a spiral staircase, where below surface level he found a long underground passage, the way lit by hidden vents. The walls were faced with stone slabs and the floor was carpeted. This subterranean corridor passed under the street that separated Fouquet's house from the

Park of Vincennes. At the end of the passage was a staircase matching the one by which Fouquet had descended. He climbed the second staircase, pressed a knob to open a door into a closet similar to the one in his office, and from this closet emerged into a room that was deserted, though furnished with great elegance.

Once inside the room he examined its mirror door to make sure that it showed no trace of its function when closed, and then, seemingly satisfied, he unlocked, with a small vermeil key, the triple locks of a door in the opposite wall.

This time the door opened onto a lovely and sumptuously furnished room in which sat on a cushioned chair a woman of supreme beauty, who, at the sound of his entry, rose and ran toward Fouquet.

“My God!” cried the latter, recoiling in astonishment. “Madame la Marquise de Bellière,* you—here!”

“Yes,” murmured the marquise,

“yes, it’s me, Monsieur.”

“Marquise, dear Marquise,” said Fouquet, almost falling at her feet. “Ah! Mon Dieu! But how did you come here? And I, I made you wait!”

“For a long time, Monsieur, oh! A very long time.”

“I’m happy to think such a wait seemed long to you, Marquise!”

“An eternity, Monsieur. I rang more than twenty times—didn’t you hear?”

“Marquise, you are pale, you’re trembling.”

“Didn’t you hear me calling you?”

“Yes, I heard you, Madame, but I couldn’t come. And how could I imagine that it was you, after your harshness and refusals? If I’d been able to suspect the happiness that awaited me, believe me, Marquise, I would have left everything to fall at your knees, as I do at this moment.”

The marquise looked around her. “Are we alone, Monsieur?” she asked.

“Oh, yes, Madame! I can answer for that.”

“Really?” said the marquise sadly.

“You sigh? But why?”

“All these mysteries, all these precautions,” said the marquise with some bitterness. “As if you were afraid of anyone suspecting your amours.”

“Would you prefer their being conducted in public?”

“Oh, no—not for a man of such delicacy,” said the marquise with a smile.

“Come, come, Marquise, no reproaches, I beg of you!”

“Reproaches! Do I have a right to make any?”

“No, unfortunately for me. But tell me, you who for a year I’ve loved without return and without hope....”

“You’re mistaken: without hope, it’s true, but not without return.”

“Ah, but for me, with love, there’s only one proof, and I still await it.”

“I’ve come to bring it to you, Monsieur.”

Fouquet tried to take the marquise in his arms, but she disengaged herself with a gesture. “Will you always make that mistake, Monsieur, and refuse to accept from me the only thing I can give you, my devotion?”

“Ah, then you don’t love me—for devotion is only a virtue, while love is a passion.”

“Listen to me, Monsieur, I beg you, for I wouldn’t have come here without a serious reason, as I’m sure you know.”

“I don’t care what the reason is so long as you’re here, so long as I see you and talk with you.”

“Yes, you’re right, the important thing is that I’m here, where no one can see me, and where I can talk with you.”

Fouquet fell on his knees before her. "Speak, speak, Madame," he said. "I listen!"

The marquise looked at Fouquet there on his knees, and in her expression there was a strange mixture of love and melancholy. "Oh!" she murmured at last. "If I could be the one who had the right to see you every minute, to speak with you whenever I wanted! How I wish I was the one to watch over you, that I didn't need to tug on wires to summon you and conjure up, like a sylph, the man she loves, though only for an hour before he disappears back into the shadows, a mystery even stranger when he leaves than when he came. Oh, she must be a very happy woman."

"Are you speaking, by chance, of my wife, Marquise?" said Fouquet with a smile.

"Yes, I speak of her."

"Well! Don't envy her, Marquise; of all the women with whom I have relations, Madame Fouquet is the one

who sees me the least, speaks with me the least, and is the least in my confidence.”

“At least, Monsieur, she’s not reduced, as I am, to pulling a knob on a mirror to call for you; at least you don’t reply to her summons by that awful clanging that comes from I know not where; at least you haven’t forbidden her to seek the secret of those communications upon pain of never seeing you again, as you’ve forbidden those who came before me and will come here after me.”

“Ah, you’re unjust, dear Marquise, and mistaken in complaining about mystery when it’s by mystery alone that one can love without trouble, and only by love without trouble can one be genuinely happy. But let’s return to you, Marquise, to this devotion of which you spoke while trying to deceive me that devotion is actually love.”

“A moment ago,” replied the marquise, passing over her eyes a hand that modeled the perfect

contours of antiquity, “I was ready to speak, with clarity and boldness, but now I’m confused, troubled, and trembling, afraid to bring you bad news.”

“If it’s bad news that brought you to me, Marquise, then that news, however bad, is welcome—but instead, since you’re here, since you admit you’re not completely indifferent to me, set aside the bad news and speak only of yourself.”

“No, no, on the contrary, ask it of me, demand it immediately, so I won’t be distracted by sentiment. Fouquet, my friend, it’s of immense importance.”

“You astound me, Marquise—more than that, you make me almost afraid, seeing you so serious, so preoccupied, you who understand so well the world in which we live. It’s serious, then?”

“Oh, very serious! Listen.”

“But first, how did you come here?”

"I'll tell you later; first, to business."

"Speak, Marquise! Pardon my impatience, I beg."

"You know that Monsieur Colbert has been appointed a financial intendant?"

"Bah! Colbert, the little Colbert?"

"Yes, the little Colbert."

"The factotum of Monsieur de Mazarin?"

"Exactly."

"Well! What do you see frightening in that, dear Marquise? Little Colbert an intendant, that's surprising, I admit, but it isn't terrible."

"Do you think that the king has given that man, whom you call a little pen-pusher, such a position without an urgent reason?"

"First, is it really true the king gave him that appointment?"

"So they say."

“So who says?”

“Everyone.”

“Everyone, that’s the same as no one. Name me someone well informed who says it.”

“Madame Vanel.”*

“Ah! Now you do begin to frighten me,” said Fouquet with a smile. “If anyone is well informed, or ought to be, it’s she.”

“Don’t speak ill of poor Marguerite, Monsieur Fouquet, not when she still loves you.”

“Bah! Really? Unbelievable. I thought that little Colbert, as you called him, had trodden all over that love and covered it with his own tracks.”

“Fouquet, Fouquet, is that how you are toward those you’ve given up?”

“Come, are you going to take the side of Madame Vanel, Marquise?”

“Yes, I am, because as I repeat,

she still loves you—and the proof is she wants to save you.”

“Through you, Marquise, which is clever of her. No guardian angel could be more appealing to me and lead me more surely to salvation. But tell me, how do you know Marguerite?”

“We were at convent together.”

“And you say she’s the one who told you Monsieur Colbert had been appointed an intendant?”

“Yes.”

“Well! Enlighten me, marquise: here is Monsieur Colbert, made an intendant; in what way can an intendant, in other words one of my subordinates, my clerk if you will—how could he be a threat to me, even if he is Monsieur Colbert?”

“It seems to me you’re overlooking something, Monsieur,” replied the marquise.

“What?”

“This: that Monsieur Colbert hates

you.”

“Hates me!” cried Fouquet. “My God, Marquise, where have you been keeping yourself? Everyone hates me—he’s just one of the many.”

“This one more than the others.”

“That’s as may be.”

“He is ambitious.”

“Who isn’t, Marquise?”

“Yes, but his ambition knows no limits.”

“So we see, since he tried to follow me with Madame Vanel.”

“And he succeeded, so take care.”

“Do you think he presumes to advance from intendant to surintendant?”

“Don’t you already fear that?”

“Ho ho!” laughed Fouquet. “To succeed me with Madame Vanel is all very well, but to win favor with the king is another thing. France is not

won over so easily as an accountant's wife."

"Everything has its price, Monsieur—if not in gold, then in power."

"You are evidence to the contrary, Madame—you, to whom I've offered millions."

"I don't need your millions, Fouquet, I need love, true and absolute—that I would have accepted. You see, everything can be bought, if not by one thing, then by another."

"So, Monsieur Colbert, as you see it, is bargaining to take my place as superintendent? Come, Marquise, don't be concerned, he's not nearly rich enough to buy that position."

"But what if, instead, he steals it?"

"Ah! That's another thing entirely. Unfortunately for him, before he can reach me in my central keep, he has to breach all the outer defenses—and I'm devilishly well-fortified, Marquise."

"And what you call the outer

defenses are your retainers, aren't they? Your friends?"

"Exactly."

"And is Monsieur d'Emerys one of your retainers?"

"Yes."

"And is Monsieur Lyodot one of your friends?"

"Certainly."

"Monsieur de Vanin?"

"Oh, they can do what they like with Monsieur de Vanin, but...."

"But...?"

"But they'd better not touch the others."

"Well! If you don't want anyone to touch Messieurs d'Emerys and Lyodot, you'd better stand to arms."

"Who's threatening them?"

"Will you listen to me now?"

"Intently, Marquise."

“Without interruption?”

“Speak.”

“Well! This morning, Marguerite sent for me.”

“Oh?”

“Yes.”

“And what did she want?”

“‘I dare not go to Monsieur Fouquet myself,’ she said to me.”

“Bah! Why? Did she think I’d reproach her? Poor woman, she’s wrong, God knows.”

“‘You go to him and tell him to beware of Monsieur Colbert.’”

“What, she wants to warn me about her own lover?”

“I told you she still loves you.”

“And then, Marquise?”

“‘Monsieur Colbert,’ she added, ‘visited me two hours ago to inform me he’d been made an intendant.’”

“I’ve already told you, Marquise, that Monsieur Colbert is no threat to me as my subordinate.”

“Yes, but that’s not all: Marguerite is friends, as you know, with Madame d’Emerys and Madame Lyodot.”

“Yes.”

“Well! Monsieur Colbert asked her a lot of probing questions about those two gentlemen, and their degree of devotion to you.”

“Oh, I’d answer for those two absolutely. You’d have to kill them to separate them from me.”

“Then Madame Vanel was obliged to receive a visitor, leaving Monsieur Colbert for a few minutes, and since Colbert never wastes a moment, the new intendant took out a pencil and began making some notes on a pad on the table.”

“Notes about d’Emerys and Lyodot?”

“Exactly.”

“I’d be curious to know what those notes said.”

“That’s just what I’ve come to bring you.”

“Madame Vanel got hold of Colbert’s notes and sent them through you?”

“No, but by a lucky chance that feels like a miracle, she got a copy of those notes.”

“How?”

“Listen. I told you that Colbert had found a writing pad on the table?”

“Yes.”

“And that he’d taken a pencil from his pocket?”

“Yes.”

“And used it to write on the paper?”

“Yes.”

“Well! This was a hard pencil, of graphite, and when it wrote on the

top sheet it made an impression on the one below, an invisible imprint in white."

"And then?"

"Colbert, in tearing off the first sheet, didn't think about the second."

"Well?"

"Well! On the second, with care one could read what had been written on the first. Madame Vanel read it and then sent for me."

"Ah!"

"Then, after making sure I was devoted to your interests, she gave me the paper and explained to me the secret of this house."

"And this paper?" said Fouquet, anxious despite himself.

"Here it is, Monsieur; read it," said the marquise.

Fouquet read: "Names of the parties to be condemned by the Court of Justice: d'Emerys, friend of M.F.;

Lyodot, friend of M.F.; de Vanin, indiff. D'Emerys! Lyodot!" gasped Fouquet, reading it again.

"Friends of M.F.," pointed out the marquise.

"But what does this mean: 'to be condemned by the Court of Justice'?"

"Dame!" said the marquise. "It seems clear to me. Besides, there's more. Read, read!"

Fouquet continued: "The first two to death, the third to be dismissed, with Messieurs d'Hautemont and de La Valette, whose property will only be confiscated. Good God!" cried Fouquet. "To death—to death, Lyodot and d'Emerys! ...But even if the Court of Justice condemns them to death, the king would never authorize their condemnation, and they couldn't be executed without the king's signature."

"But the king appointed Monsieur Colbert an intendant."

"Ohh!" cried Fouquet, as if he

suddenly saw an abyss opening beneath his feet. “Impossible! Impossible! But who has rubbed pencil lead across Monsieur Colbert’s impressions?”

“Me. I was afraid the first line would fade.”

“Now, I must know everything.”

“You will learn nothing, Monsieur, as long as you continue to despise your enemy as you do.”

“Pardon me, dear Marquise, excuse me. Yes, Monsieur Colbert is my enemy, I believe that now. Yes, Monsieur Colbert is a man to fear, I admit it. But ... but I still have time, and since you’re here, since you assure me of your devotion, since you show me your love, and since we’re alone....”

“I came here to save you, Monsieur Fouquet, not to lose myself,” said the marquise, rising. “So, take care.”

“Marquise, really, you’re too

frightened by this, unless your fright is just a pretext....”

“He’s brilliant, this Monsieur Colbert, and very deep! Take care....”

Fouquet arose as well. “And I?” he asked.

“Oh, you! You have only a noble heart. Take care. Take care!”

“So, now?”

“Now, my friend, I’ve done what I had to do, at the risk of losing my reputation. Adieu!”

“Not adieu, but au revoir!”

“Perhaps,” said the marquise.

And, giving Fouquet her hand to kiss, she marched so resolutely toward the door that Fouquet didn’t dare to bar her passage. As for Fouquet, he returned, head bowed and forehead clouded, through his underground passage along which ran the copper wires that communicated from one house to the other, transmitting, on either side of the

matching mirrors, the calls and responses of the unseen correspondents.

V

Abbot Fouquet

F the subterranean passage and triggered the spring to swing open the mirror. He was scarcely back in his office when he heard a knock at the door and a familiar voice called out, "Open up, Monseigneur, I beg you, open up."

Fouquet quickly restored some order to his desk so nothing would indicate his brief absence. He spread out some papers, took up a pen, and to gain a little time, said loudly,

“Who’s there?”

“What! Monseigneur doesn’t recognize me?” the voice replied.

“Of course, I know you, my friend,” Fouquet said to himself. Then aloud: “Isn’t that Gourville?”*

“Mais oui, Monseigneur.”

Fouquet rose, glanced at himself in one of the mirrors, went to the door, slid the bolt open, and Gourville came in. “Ah, Monseigneur!” he said. “What cruelty!”

“Why?”

“I’ve spent a quarter of an hour begging you to open, and you never even answered me.”

“Once and for all, you know quite well that I don’t want to be disturbed when I’m working. Now, you may be an exception, Gourville, but I want everyone else to respect that rule.”

“Monseigneur, at this moment orders, doors, locks, and walls mean nothing to me, I’d smash them all.”

“Oh? So, this is important?” asked Fouquet.

“I should say so, Monseigneur!” said Gourville.

“Tell me what’s happened,” said Fouquet, moved by the distress of Gourville, his closest confidant.

“There’s a secret Court of Justice, Monseigneur.”

“I know about that; but has it convened, Gourville?”

“It’s not only convened, it’s passed a sentence, Monseigneur.”

“A sentence!” said the superintendent with a shudder and pallor he couldn’t hide. “Against whom?”

“Against two of your friends.”

“Lyodot and d’Emerys, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Monseigneur.”

“But sentenced to what?”

“Sentenced to death.”

“Condemned! Oh, but you must be mistaken, Gourville, it’s impossible.”

“Here’s a copy of the sentence, which the king is to sign today, if he hasn’t already.”

Fouquet grabbed the paper, read it, and returned it to Gourville. “The king will never sign it,” he said.

Gourville shook his head. “Don’t fool yourself, Monseigneur; that Monsieur Colbert is a bold official.”

“Monsieur Colbert again!” cried Fouquet. “Çà! Why does his name keep tormenting my ears? He’s too trivial a man, Gourville, to drive an affair of this weight. Let Monsieur Colbert appear, and I’ll face him; let him raise his head, and I’ll crush him; but you understand that I must have a light to see him by, and a platform upon which to stand.”

“Steady, Monseigneur, you underestimate this Colbert. Watch out, for this grim financier is like one of those meteors that one barely glimpses before it strikes from above;

by the time we see it coming, it's too late."

"Oh, Gourville, that's too much!" said Fouquet, smiling. "Pardon me, my friend, if I decline to panic. Monsieur Colbert, a meteor! Corbleu! We'll see him coming. Show me his words and deeds; what's he done?"

"He's ordered two gallows from the Paris Executioner," Gourville said simply.

Fouquet raised his head and his eyes flashed. "Are you sure about this?" he said.

"Here's the proof, Monseigneur." And Gourville handed the superintendent a note copied by one of the secretaries at the Hôtel de Ville who was in Fouquet's pay.

"Yes, it's true," murmured the minister. "The scaffold is ordered ... but the king hasn't signed, Gourville, and the king will not sign."

"We'll know that soon enough," said Gourville.

“How so?”

“If the king has signed the condemnations, the gallows will be delivered to the Hôtel de Ville tonight so they can be erected in the morning.”

“But no, no!” Fouquet said, still in denial. “You’re all wrong, and I’d be a fool to believe it. Lyodot came to see me just yesterday morning, and three days ago I received a cargo of Syracuse wine from our good d’Emerys.”

“What does that prove?” Gourville replied. “Other than that the Court of Justice met secretly, deliberated in the absence of the accused, and then had them arrested.”

“So, they’ve been arrested?”

“Indeed.”

“But when and how were they arrested?”

“Lyodot, yesterday at dawn; d’Emerys, in the evening of the day before, when he was returning from

his mistress's house. No one noticed their disappearance until Colbert lifted the mask and had it publicized; it's being shouted now in every street in Paris, and truly, Monseigneur, there's hardly anyone but you who hasn't heard it."

Fouquet circled the room, pacing ever more anxiously. "What have you decided, Monseigneur?" said Gourville.

"If this is so, I should go to the king," said Fouquet. "But on the way to the Louvre, I'll stop at the *Hôtel de Ville*. 24 If the orders have been signed, we'll find out there!"

Gourville shrugged. "Incredulity!" he said. "It's the plague of all great minds."

"Gourville! Really!"

"Yes," he continued. "Too slow to believe, then the truth is upon you, and it's all over in an instant."

"Let's go," said Fouquet. "On our way, Gourville."

“Not so fast,” said the latter.
“Abbot Fouquet* is outside.”

“My brother is here?” replied Fouquet with some chagrin. “Has he come to bring me more bad news, as usual? Diable! If my brother has come, things are bad indeed. You should have told me sooner, I’d have been more easily persuaded.”

“Monseigneur slanders him,” said Gourville, laughing. “If he’s come, it’s not with bad intent.”

“Are you his apologist?” said Fouquet. “For a man without a heart, a head without ideas, and a belly that’s never full?”

“He just knows you have money.”

“And would spend it all if he could. He’d happily ruin me.”

“No, he only wants to fill his own purse.”

“A hundred thousand crowns a month for the past two years! Enough, already! Corbleu! That’s what I pay, Gourville, and I know my own

accounts.”

Gourville laughed behind his hand.

“Yes, I know what you mean—it’s the king who pays, not the superintendent. But that’s an ugly joke, Gourville, and this isn’t the time for it.”

“Don’t be angry, Monseigneur.”

“No? Then send Abbot Fouquet away, I don’t have a sou to spare. He’s left me alone for a month—why couldn’t he leave me be for another?”

Gourville moved toward the door. “Perhaps he’s tired of bad company,” he said, “and prefers you to his bandits.”

“When he needs to pay them! It’s strange, Gourville, to hear you act as advocate for Abbot Fouquet.”

“Eh, all things and all men have their good side, Monseigneur—that is, their useful side.”

“The bandits who feed and drink at the abbot’s trough are useful? I’d like

to see some proof.”

“When the time comes, Monseigneur, you’ll be glad to have these bandits at hand.”

“Then, you advise me to stay on the abbot’s good side?” said Fouquet ironically.

“I advise you, Monseigneur, not to turn away a hundred or so ruffians who, if they put their rapiers end to end, would make a cordon of steel that could surround three thousand men.”

Fouquet looked thoughtfully at Gourville for a moment, and said, “You’re right, Gourville.” Then he opened the door and said to the footman, “Invite in Abbot Fouquet.”

Two minutes later, the abbot appeared in the doorway with a deep bow. He was a man aged forty to forty-five, half man of the Church, half man of the sword, a swashbuckling abbot; when he wasn’t wearing a rapier, it was because his belt held pistols.

Fouquet saluted him more as an older brother than as a churchman, and said, "What can I do for you, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"Oh! How coldly you greet me, mon frère!"

"I greet you like a man in a hurry, Monsieur."

The abbot looked suspiciously at Gourville, anxiously at Fouquet, and said, "I must pay three hundred pistoles to Monsieur de Brégy tonight—a gambling debt, a debt of honor."

"What else?" said Fouquet brusquely, for he knew Abbot Fouquet wouldn't have disturbed him just for that.

"A thousand to my butcher, who's cut me off."

"And?"

"Twelve hundred to my tailor," continued the abbot. "The clown is withholding seven of my men's outfits, which is compromising my livery, and my mistress is threatening

to replace me with a tax-farmer, which would be a humiliation for the Church.”

“And beyond that?”

“You will notice, Monsieur,” said the abbot humbly, “that I’ve asked for nothing for myself.”

“It’s a hard thing to do,” replied Fouquet, “so I’ll wait until you’re ready, Monsieur.”

“And though I’ve asked for nothing, I assure you, it’s not for lack of need.”

The minister looked thoughtful for a moment. “Twelve hundred pistoles to the tailor,” he said. “Rather a lot of clothing, it seems to me.”

“I maintain a hundred men!” said the abbot proudly. “That costs money, you know.”

“A hundred men? Why?” said Fouquet. “Are you a Richelieu or a Mazarin who needs a hundred guards? What do these hundred men do for you? Tell me.”

“Are you serious?” cried Abbot Fouquet. “How can you ask why I keep a hundred men?”

“I want to know. What do you need with a hundred men? Explain!”

“Ingrate!” said the abbot indignantly.

“What do you mean?”

“For myself, Monsieur le Surintendant, I need only a single valet, but you, who have so many enemies ... why, not even a hundred men are enough to defend you! One hundred men? It would take ten thousand! I maintain these men so that in public places and in gatherings no one raises a voice against you; without that, Monsieur, you would be publicly insulted, even torn to pieces. You wouldn’t last a week, not a single week, do you hear me?”

“Ah! I didn’t know you were such a champion of mine, Monsieur l’Abbé.”

“You doubt it!” cried the abbot.

“Listen to the latest, then. Just yesterday, in the Rue de la Huchette, a man was bargaining for a chicken.”

“Was he? And how did that hurt me, Abbot?”

“Like this: the chicken was scrawny. The buyer refused to pay eighteen sous for it, saying he wouldn’t pay that much for the skin of chicken from which Monsieur Fouquet had already robbed the flesh and fat.”

“And so?”

“This remark was greeted with laughter,” continued the abbot, “laughter at your expense by the rabble, death of all the devils! The joker continued, ‘Give me a chicken fed by Monsieur Colbert, if you please, and I’ll pay whatever you like.’ And he was applauded! What a frightful scandal! It was the kind of thing that makes a brother want to hide his face.”

Fouquet colored. “And you hid it?” said the superintendent.

“I did not,” continued the abbot, “because I had one of my men in the crowd—a new recruit from the provinces, a *Monsieur de Menneville* 25 whom I love. He burst through the crowd and said to the joker, ‘You rogue, here’s a thrust for Colbert, by thunder!’ ‘And here’s one for Fouquet,’ the joker replied. And they both drew steel in front of the poultry shop, with a mob of the curious around them and five hundred more watching from the windows.”

“Well?” said Fouquet.

“Well, Monsieur! My Menneville skewered the joker, to the amazement of the audience, and said to the poultry vendor, ‘Take this turkey, mon ami—he’s fatter than your chicken.’ And that, Monsieur,” finished the abbot triumphantly, “is how I spend my income: to sustain the family honor!”

Fouquet looked down.

“And I have a hundred more like that,” the abbot concluded.

“Very well,” said Fouquet. “Give your bills to Gourville and await me here this evening.”

“We’ll sup together?”

“We shall.”

“But isn’t the treasury closed?”

“Gourville will open it for you. Au revoir, Monsieur l’Abbé.”

The abbot bowed. “Then we’re still friends?” he said.

“Yes, we’re friends. Come, Gourville.”

“You’re leaving? You won’t be eating with us?”

“I should be back in an hour, don’t worry.” Then, in a whisper to Gourville: “Have them harness the team of English horses,” he said, “and we’ll head for the Hôtel de Ville in Paris.”

VI

Wine for Monsieur de La Fontaine

T Fouquet's guests to Saint-Mandé were already arriving, and the whole house was warming up with supper preparations, when the superintendent took the road to Paris behind his swift horses, following the river quays to avoid the street traffic on the way to the Hôtel de Ville. When he arrived, it was a quarter to eight; Fouquet got

out at the corner of the Rue du Long-Pont and went into the Place de Grève on foot with Gourville. At the entrance to the square they saw a man dressed in black and violet with a dignified air just preparing to enter a coach, telling the driver to take the road to Vincennes. He had loaded before him a huge basket of bottles he'd just bought at the Our Lady's Portrait cabaret.

“Hey! That's Vatel,* my steward,” said Fouquet to Gourville.

“Yes, Monseigneur,” replied the latter.

“What's he doing at Our Lady's Portrait?”

“Buying wine, it looks like.”

“What, buying wine for me at a cabaret?” said Fouquet. “Is my wine cellar reduced to that?” And he approached his steward as the man was arranging the wine in his coach with great care. “Holà! Vatel!” he said in a voice of authority.

“Take care, Monseigneur,” said Gourville, “you’ll attract attention.”

“Fine, what do I care? Vatel!”

The man dressed in black and purple turned around. He had a mild and preoccupied expression, like a mathematician without the professorial pride. Vatel often looked like a child or absent-minded man; his eye twinkled a bit and a smile played around his lips, but an observer might notice that this sparkle and smile were personal rather than reflections of his surroundings.

At the sound of the voice he turned to look. “Oh! Is it you, Monseigneur?”

“Yes, me. What the devil are you up to, Vatel? Wine? You’re buying wine at a cabaret in the Place de Grève? You might as well shop at *the Pomme-de-Pin or the Barreaux Verts.*” 26

“But, Monseigneur,” said Vatel calmly, after shooting a hostile glance at Gourville, “why do you

question me? Is my cellar not well maintained?"

"Yes, of course, Vatel, but...."

"But what?" replied Vatel.

Gourville nudged the superintendent's arm.

"Don't be upset, Vatel, I just thought my cellar—your cellar—sufficiently well stocked that we wouldn't need to buy from Our Lady's Portrait."

"Because, Monsieur," said Vatel, dropping from monseigneur to monsieur with a certain disdain, "your cellar was stocked such that when some of your guests came to dine with you, they found nothing to drink."

Fouquet, surprised, looked at Gourville and then back at Vatel. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that your sommelier doesn't stock wine for all tastes, Monsieur, and that Monsieur de La Fontaine,* Monsieur Pellisson,* and

Monsieur Conrart* find nothing to drink at your house. Those gentlemen don't care for fine wines, so what is to be done?"

"What, then?"

"I lay in a supply of this Joigny wine they like. I know they come every week to drink at Our Lady's Portrait, so it's there I make my purchase."

Fouquet had nothing to say to this. He was impressed.

Vatel, however, had plenty more to say, and it was clear he was just warming up. "You might as well reproach me, Monseigneur, for also going to Rue Planche-Mibray to bring back the cider that Monsieur Loret* drinks when he dines at your house."

"Loret drinks cider at my house?" said Fouquet, laughing.

"Why, yes, Monsieur! That's why he dines there with such pleasure."

"Vatel," cried Fouquet, shaking his steward's hand, "you're quite a man!

And I thank you for recognizing that at my house Messieurs de La Fontaine, Conrart, and Loret are as important as dukes, peers, and princes, even more so than myself. Vatel, you're a fine servant, and I'm doubling your salary."

Vatel didn't thank him, he just shrugged slightly and replied with this haughty sentiment: "To be thanked for doing one's duty is a humiliation."

"He's right," said Gourville, and then drew Fouquet's attention to another matter with a gesture. He was indicating a low tumbril drawn by cart horses bearing a pair of gallows, lashed together and guarded by a bored archer who sat on the end of the beams while ignoring, as much as he could, the comments of a hundred onlookers as they remarked on their destination near the Hôtel de Ville. Fouquet shuddered.

"It's decided, as you see," said Gourville.

"But it isn't done yet," replied

Fouquet.

“Don’t deceive yourself with false hopes, Monseigneur—if they’ve gone this far, there’s nothing you can do to stop it.”

“I have not approved this.”

“Monsieur de Lyonne has approved it for you.”

“I’m going to the Louvre.”

“You’ll do no such thing.”

“What you advise is cowardice!” cried Fouquet. “You advise me to abandon my friends, to throw down my arms and surrender!”

“I advise nothing of the sort, Monseigneur. Think: can you afford to resign the post of superintendent right now?”

“...No.”

“Well! If the king plans to replace you....”

“Then he’ll replace me.”

“Certainly, if you choose to insult him.”

“Yes, but at least I won’t have been a coward. I don’t want my friends to die, and they shall not die.”

“And for that, you must go to the Louvre?”

“Gourville!”

“Take care. Once you go to the Louvre, you’ll have to defend your friends’ actions and support everything they’ve done, or else abandon them.”

“Never!”

“Forgive me, but the king will either frame it in those terms or force you to do so.”

“...That’s true.”

“Which is why you need to avoid an open breach. Return to Saint-Mandé, Monseigneur.”

“Gourville, I’m not budging from this spot where the crime will be

committed, to my eternal shame—I'm not moving, I say, until I find a way to combat my enemies."

"Monseigneur," replied Gourville, "I'd sympathize if I didn't know you have one of the world's sharpest minds and control a hundred and fifty million into the bargain. You're equal to the king in position, and a hundred and fifty million times greater than him in funds. Monsieur Colbert didn't even have the sense to have the king accept Mazarin's bequest. Now, if you're the richest man in the kingdom but refuse to spend your money, you might as well be poor. I say, let's go back to Saint-Mandé."

"To consult with Pellisson? Yes."

"No, Monseigneur, to consult with your money."

"Let's go, then," said Fouquet, his eyes stinging. "Yes! Back to Saint-Mandé!"

He returned to his carriage, followed by Gourville. On their way out of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine

they passed Vatel's little coach,
packed with its Joigny wine.
Fouquet's black horses, given their
head, thundered by at full speed,
causing the steward's coach horse to
shy, and the steward to shout in
alarm, "Careful of my bottles!"

VII

The

Gallery of

Saint-Mandé

Fifty guests awaited the superintendent. He didn't even take a moment with his valet to spruce up, he went straight into the main salon. There his friends were gathered and chatting. The staff was preparing to serve supper, while Abbot Fouquet was watching for the return of his brother and trying to maintain the honor of his house in his absence.

The superintendent arrived to a general murmur of joy and welcome. Fouquet, the epitome of affability, good humor, and generosity, was beloved by his poets, artists, and men of affairs. His face, from which his little court read, as if from a god, the climate of his soul, and governed their behavior thereby—his brow, which business never troubled, was paler that evening than usual, and more than one eye noticed his pallor.

Fouquet took his place at the head of the table and cheerfully presided over supper. He described Vatel's expedition to La Fontaine. He recounted the story of Menneville and the scrawny chicken to Pellisson so the entire table could hear. The guests erupted in a storm of laughter and mockery that was only quelled by a grave and somber gesture from Pellisson. Abbot Fouquet, unsure why his brother had made that the subject of conversation, listened carefully and studied the faces of Gourville and the superintendent, but found no explanation.

Pellisson took the matter up. "So, now we're talking about Monsieur Colbert?" he said.

"Why not?" replied Fouquet. "Especially if it's true, as they say, that the king has made him his intendant."

Fouquet said the word with a marked emphasis, and his guests instantly exploded with outrage. "That miser!" said one.

"That peasant!" said another.

"That hypocrite!" said a third.

Pellisson exchanged a significant glance with Fouquet. "Messieurs, really," he said, "we're libeling a man we scarcely know. It's uncharitable, it's unseemly, and as you can see from Monsieur le Surintendant, I'm sure he agrees."

"Completely," replied Fouquet. "Pay no mind to Monsieur Colbert's fat chickens when tonight we have before us Monsieur Vatel's truffled pheasants."

These words lifted the dark mood that had descended on the guests. Gourville plied the poets with the Joigny wine, while the abbot, attentive as a man is who's always short of funds, entertained the financiers and the military men, succeeding so well that, in the happy flow of conversation, their common anxiety was completely forgotten.

The last will and testament of Cardinal Mazarin was the subject of discussion during the latter courses and dessert, and then Fouquet ordered the platters of sweets and decanters of liqueur carried into the salon next to the grand gallery. He led the way after them, taking the hand of a lady he'd selected as his queen of the evening.

Then, as the violins played, the guests began their promenades along the gallery and out into the gardens, under the soft and fragrant spring sky. Pellisson approached the superintendent and said to him, "Monseigneur is troubled?"

“Deeply,” replied the minister. “Ask Gourville about it.”

Pellisson, turning, found La Fontaine hard on his heels, and had to listen to a Latin verse the poet had composed about Vatel. La Fontaine had spent the last hour in the corner refining this poem and now sought a proper audience for it. He thought he'd found it in Pellisson, but the essayist evaded him. He settled on Loret, who in his turn had just composed a quatrain in honor of the supper and its host, whom he dubbed *Amphitryon*. 27 La Fontaine tried to recite his verse, but Loret insisted on declaiming his quatrain. La Fontaine turned and fixed his sights upon the Comte de Charost, but just then Fouquet took the count by the arm. Abbot Fouquet saw that the poet, oblivious as usual, was going to pursue the pair, and intercepted him. La Fontaine immediately seized upon him and began reciting his verse. The abbot, who knew no Latin, just nodded his head in time to La Fontaine's delivery, following the rhythm of the poet's dactyls and

spondées.

Meanwhile, behind the pastry table, Fouquet recounted the day's events to his son-in-law, Monsieur de Charost.

"We can't talk seriously here," said Pellisson to Gourville. "We should send all those not of the inner circle out to watch the fireworks."

"I'll take care of it," said Gourville, who went and said a few words to Vatel. Shortly thereafter they saw the latter leading the ladies, social butterflies, and gossipers outside. Meanwhile in the gallery, lit by three hundred wax candles and in full view of everyone in the garden, the key men talked while the frivolous enjoyed the fireworks.

Gourville approached Fouquet and said to him, "Monsieur, everyone is here."

"Everyone?" said Fouquet.

"Yes; see for yourself."

The superintendent looked along

the gallery and counted eight persons. Pellisson and Gourville walked arm in arm conversing about trivial matters. Loret and two officers passed them, similarly engaged. Abbot Fouquet stood alone. Fouquet, with Monsieur de Charost, continued strolling as if absorbed in conversation with his son-in-law. "Messieurs," he said aloud, "don't turn your heads; keep walking and don't seem to pay me any attention, but listen."

A perfect silence fell, disturbed only by the distant voices of the happy guests as they moved about the gardens to find better spots from which to view the fireworks. Inside was the strange spectacle of men walking back and forth in groups as if occupied with each other, but actually listening to only one of their number, who spoke as if only to his companion.

"Messieurs," said Fouquet, "you've probably noticed that two of our friends are missing, two who were with us only last Wednesday ... for

God's sake, Abbot, don't stop and look around, just listen. Walk as nonchalantly as you can to the window, where, with your excellent vision, if you see anyone approaching the gallery, you can warn us by coughing."

The abbot obeyed. "I haven't noticed anyone missing," said Pellisson, though his back was turned to Fouquet and he was walking in the opposite direction.

Loret said, "I don't see Monsieur Lyodot, who pays me my salary."

"And I don't see my friend d'Emerys," said the abbot from the window, "who owes me eleven hundred livres from our last card game."

"Loret," said Fouquet, somberly and with head bowed, "you'll never again be paid your salary by Lyodot; and you, Abbot, will never get your eleven hundred livres from d'Emerys—for both are doomed to die."

"To die?" everyone cried, pausing

their play-acting despite themselves at the sound of the terrible word.

“Control yourselves, Messieurs,” said Fouquet, “for we may be spied upon. But yes: to die.”

“To die!” repeated Pellisson. “Those men whom I saw within the last week, full of health, happiness, and plans for the future! Dear God, what is a man, that disease should carry him away so suddenly?”

“They die of no disease,” said Fouquet.

“Then, there must be a cure,” said Loret.

“No cure. Messieurs Lyodot and d’Emerys are in the evening of their final day.”

“What are these gentlemen dying of, then?” cried an officer.

“Ask that of he who kills them,” replied Fouquet.

“Who kills them? Who is killing them?” the chorus cried in fright.

“Or even better, ask what? For they are to be hanged!” said Fouquet in a hollow voice that sounded like a death knell in that luxurious gallery, glittering with gold, candles, flowers, and embroidery.

Everyone stopped involuntarily, and the abbot left his window, as the first rockets of the fireworks rose above the treetops. The cries from the gardens seemed to draw the superintendent to the sight. He approached a window and his friends gathered behind him, attentive to every word and gesture.

“Messieurs,” he said, “Monsieur Colbert has arrested, tried, and sentenced to death two of my friends; what shall I do?”

“God’s death!” said the abbot. “We must have Colbert’s guts out.”

“Monseigneur,” said Pellisson, “you must speak to His Majesty.”

“The king, my dear Pellisson, has signed the order of execution.”

“Well!” said the Comte de Charost.
“This execution must be prevented,
that’s all.”

“Impossible,” said Gourville. “...
Unless we could bribe the jailers.”

“Or the prison warden,” said
Fouquet.

“This very night, so the prisoners
can escape.”

“Which of you will take charge of
this matter?”

“I’ll carry the cash,” said the
abbot.

“I’ll handle the negotiation,” said
Pellisson.

“Words and money,” nodded
Fouquet. “Five hundred thousand
livres to the Governor of *the*
Conciergerie 28 ought to be enough,
but we’ll go a million if we have to.”

“A million!” cried the abbot. “For
far less than that, I’d sack half of
Paris.”

“No sacking, no disorder,” said Pellisson. “We buy off the governor, the prisoners escape, and once out of the arms of the law, they rally Colbert’s enemies and prove to this young king that this reckless judgment was a mistake.”

“Therefore, go to Paris, Pellisson, bring back our two victims, and then tomorrow we’ll see,” said Fouquet. “Gourville, get the five hundred thousand livres for Pellisson.”

“You’ll want some help with that,” said the abbot. “What a responsibility, peste! Don’t get carried away by it.”

“Quiet!” said Fouquet. “Someone’s coming. Ah, what a magical effect those fireworks produce!” he announced, as a shower of sparks fell, glittering, in the branches of a nearby grove.

Pellisson and Gourville left together by the door of the gallery as Fouquet went down into the garden with the other conspirators.

VIII

The *Epicureans*

A seemed to devote, all his attentions to the sparkling lights, the gentle music of the violins and oboes, and glittering rain of the fireworks, which, lighting up the sky with fiery flashes, outlined, behind the trees, the somber silhouette of the Keep of Vincennes; as, we say, the superintendent was smiling upon the ladies and poets, the fête was as merry as usual, and even Vatel, whose anxious, almost jealous look continually queried Fouquet,

showed no dissatisfaction with the unfolding of the soirée.

The fireworks over, in the gardens and under the marble porticoes the guests of the master of the house relaxed with that feeling of freedom that reflects the master host's courteous hospitality, casual grandeur, and magnificent nonchalance. The poets wandered, arm in arm, through the groves, where some of them stretched out on beds of moss, to the disservice of their velour suits and curled hair, which picked up dry leaves and bits of greenery. The ladies, though few in number, gathered to hear the songs of the musicians and the verses of the poets; others listened to the artful oratory declaimed by men who were neither actors nor poets, but to whom youth and melancholy granted an unusual eloquence.

“Why,” said La Fontaine, “has our Epicurean master not come down into the gardens? It’s wrong of him, for *Epicurus* 29 never abandoned his disciples so.”

“Monsieur,” Conrart said to him, “you’re wrong to persist in calling us Epicureans, for in truth, nothing here recalls the Philosopher of Gargettus.”

“Pfah!” replied La Fontaine. “Isn’t it written that Epicurus bought an expansive garden and lived there with his friends.”

“It is.”

“Well! Hasn’t Monsieur Fouquet bought a grand garden here at Saint-Mandé, and aren’t we living there peacefully with him and his friends?”

“Yes, quite so—but sadly neither the garden nor the friends at all resemble your example. What similarity is there between the philosophy of Monsieur Fouquet and that of Epicurus?”

“It is this: ‘Pleasure gives us happiness.’”

“So?”

“So, I think one could hardly call us unhappy. A fine meal, with Joigny wine which they are so considerate as

to import from my favorite tavern, and not a single embarrassing faux pas in an hour-long supper, despite the attendance of ten millionaires and twenty poets.”

“I’ll just stop you there: you mentioned fine food and Joigny wine—is that your evidence? Will you persist in that?”

“I will persist; *‘antecho,’ as they say at Port Royal.*” 30

“Then I must remind you that the great Epicurus lived, and made his disciples live as well, on bread, beans, and spring water.”

“Are you sure of that?” said La Fontaine. “You might be confusing Epicurus with Pythagoras, my dear Conrart.”

“But it’s certain that the great philosopher was no follower of gods or monarchs.”

“I will not admit the certainty of that!” retorted La Fontaine. “I say that Epicurus was like Monsieur

Fouquet.”

“Do not compare him to Monsieur le Surintendant!” said Conrart with some emotion. “If you do, you’ll give credence to those who spread rumors about him ... and us.”

“What rumors?”

“That we are bad Frenchmen, indifferent to the monarch and scornful of the law.”

“I return to my original statement,” said La Fontaine. “Listen, Conrart, here is the morality of Epicurus—whom I must say I consider something of a myth. Everything from that far back in antiquity is myth. Jupiter, if you follow his historical development, is life, while *Alcides* 31 is strength. The origin of these names prove me right, for Zeus is zèn, that is, to live, while Alcides is alcé, or vigor. Well! Epicurus stands for calm watchfulness or protection, and who protects our State and watches over us better than Monsieur Fouquet?”

“Mere wordplay is not moral philosophy. I say that we modern Epicureans make poor citizens.”

“Pfah!” cried La Fontaine. “If we make poor citizens, it’s not due to following the philosophy of our master. Listen to one of Epicurus’s most important aphorisms.”

“I’m listening.”

““Desire to have good leaders.””

“Well?”

“Well! What does Monsieur Fouquet say to us daily? ‘When shall we be properly governed?’ Doesn’t he, Conrart? Be honest!”

“He says that, it’s true.”

“Well! There’s your Epicurean philosophy.”

“Maybe, but it’s more than a little seditious.”

“What! Is it seditious to want to be governed by good leaders?”

“Certainly, when the current

government is bad.”

“Be patient! I have a reply to all of this.”

“Including what I just said?”

“Here: ‘Submit even to those who govern badly.’ Or as it’s written: Cacos politeuosi. You’ll grant me that text?”

“By God! I should think so. Why, you speak Greek as well as Æsop, my dear La Fontaine.”

“Is there any sedition in that, my dear Conrart?”

“God forbid!”

“Then, let’s return to Monsieur Fouquet. What has he said a thousand times? Isn’t it, ‘What a peasant that Mazarin is! What a leech! What an ass!’ Come now, Conrart, did he say that, or didn’t he?”

“I admit he did say it, perhaps a bit too often.”

“Just like Epicurus, my friend, always like Epicurus. I repeat, we are Epicureans, and isn’t that amusing?”

“Maybe, but I’m afraid that a faction like that of *Epictetus* 32 will just rise to oppose us. You know well that Philosopher of Hierapolis who called bread wasteful, beans a luxury, and spring water no better than wine; he who, when beaten by his master, though he did complain a bit, said otherwise calmly, ‘Do you want to wager you’ve broken my leg?’ And he won that bet!”

“Epictetus was an idiot.”

“True enough, but such idiocy might become the fashion if it goes by the name of Colbert.”

“Pfah!” replied La Fontaine. “Impossible. Colbert will never have followers like Epictetus.”

“Perhaps, though he is as sneaky as ... coluber, the snake.”

“Ha! You’re beaten, Conrart, if you have to stoop to wordplay that low—

admit it! Monsieur Arnault of Port Royal claims I lack logic, but I have more than his patron Monsieur Nicolle.”

“Oh, that’s something, all right,” retorted Conrart, “to be more logical than a Jansenist!”

This conclusion was greeted by an immense burst of laughter. One by one, the debaters had attracted the attention of those promenading around the grove, and the whole argument had been closely followed by this growing audience. Even Fouquet himself, the very model of self-control, had trouble holding himself in. But the dénouement of the scene was more than he could bear, and he burst out laughing. Everyone joined him, and the two philosophers were greeted with unanimous applause. La Fontaine was acclaimed the victor, thanks to his erudition and irrefutable logic, but Conrart was deemed a worthy opponent, praised for the integrity of his convictions and the purity of his conscience.

In the midst of these loud congratulations, as the ladies were reproaching the two adversaries for not having admitted women to be part of the system of Epicurean happiness, Gourville appeared at the end of the garden. Fouquet, who'd been watching for him, deftly detached himself from the group. The superintendent maintained his smiling laughter as he nonchalantly moved off, but as soon as he was out of sight, he dropped the mask.

"Well?" he said eagerly. "Where's Pellisson? How did it go?"

"Pellisson has returned from Paris."

"Did he bring the prisoners back with him?"

"He got no farther than the warden of the prison."

"What! Didn't he tell him he'd come from me?"

"He did, but the warden said, 'If someone comes on behalf of

Monsieur Fouquet, they should bring a letter from Monsieur Fouquet.”

“Oh!” said the latter. “If it’s just a matter of giving him a letter....”

“It’s not,” said Pellisson, appearing from the shadows of the little grove. “You must go personally, Monseigneur, and speak for yourself.”

“Yes, you’re right. I left everything ready as if I might go back to work, Pellisson; the horses are still hitched to the carriage. Look after my guests, Gourville.”

“May I offer another opinion, Monseigneur?” asked the latter.

“Speak, Gourville.”

“Don’t go to the warden except as a last resort; it’s bold, but it isn’t smart. Pardon me, Monsieur Pellisson, if I disagree with you, but I think, Monseigneur, that you should send the warden a letter rather than go yourself. He’s a worthy man, but don’t tempt him too far.”

“I’ll think about it,” said Fouquet.

“We still have most of the night ahead of us.”

“Don’t count too much on time, because you never have as much as you think you have,” said Pellisson. “It’s never a mistake to strike early.”

“All right,” said the superintendent. “Let’s go, Pellisson. Gourville, I commend my guests to you.”

And they departed.

The Epicureans didn’t notice that the head of their school of philosophy had gone; the violins played all night long.

IX

A Quarter of an *H*our's *D*elay

For the second time that day, felt less troubled and anxious than one might have thought. He turned to Pellisson, who in his corner of the carriage was considering rebuttals to Colbert's more serious accusations. "My dear Pellisson," said Fouquet, "it's a shame that you're not a woman."

"On the contrary, Monseigneur,"

replied Pellisson, "I think it's lucky I'm not, considering how ugly I am."

"Oh, Pellisson!" said the superintendent, laughing. "You mention how ugly you are so often that it must be a painful thing for you to think about."

"It is indeed, Monseigneur, and no one is less happy about it than I am. I was a handsome youth, but the smallpox made me hideous and stole away my main means of seduction. Now I'm your first secretary, or something like it, in charge of managing your interests—and right now, if I were a pretty woman, I could render you an important service."

"Like what?"

"I'd go to the warden of the Conciergerie and I'd seduce him, for he's a ladies' man, and I'd rescue our two prisoners."

"I hope to be able to manage that myself, though I'm not a pretty woman either," replied Fouquet.

“Agreed, Monseigneur, though by doing so you compromise yourself.”

“Agh!” cried Fouquet suddenly, in an outburst of youthful blood, or at least a memory of what that was like. “Believe me, I know a woman who has what it takes to sway the Lieutenant Governor of the Conciergerie!”

“I know fifty, Monseigneur, all fifty of whom would announce such a victory to the world, praising everywhere your devotion to your friends, and as a result you’d win the battle but lose the war.”

“I don’t speak of those women, Pellisson, I speak of a noble and beautiful creature who combines the spirit and energy of her sex with the wit and coolness of ours; I speak of a woman lovely enough that the walls of the prison would bow down before her, but so discreet that none would ever suspect who’d sent her.”

“A treasure,” said Pellisson. “That would be a fabulous gift for the Governor of the Conciergerie,

Monseigneur, and even if he lost his head for it, he'd go to his grave the luckiest of men."

"Not to mention," said Fouquet, "that the warden wouldn't have to lose his head, for he'd have some of my horses to escape upon, and half a million livres with which to live comfortably in England—and furthermore, my friend, the horses and money are the only things the lady would have to give him. Let's go find this lady, Pellisson."

The superintendent reached for the silk and golden cord that communicated with the driver. Pellisson stopped him. "Monseigneur," he said, "we could spend more time seeking this woman than Columbus took to find the New World. We have only two hours left to us, for after the warden goes to bed, how can you get to him without causing a commotion? Once the sun rises, how can we act in the shadows? Go now, Monseigneur, and don't spend the night looking for a woman, even if she is an angel."

“But, dear Pellisson, here we are before her door.”

“Before the door of an angel?”

“Yes!”

“But ... this is the house of Madame de Bellière.”

“Hush!”

“Oh, good Lord!” cried Pellisson.

“You have something to say against her?” asked Fouquet.

“Not a thing, alas! That’s why I’m dismayed. There’s absolutely nothing against her ... so what can I say to keep you from going in to see her?”

But Fouquet had already given his order and the carriage had stopped. “Keep me from going in?” said Fouquet. “No power in the world could stop me from paying a compliment to Madame du Plessis-Bellièvre—besides, who knows whether we might need her? Won’t you go with me?”

“No, Monseigneur, no.”

“But I don’t want you to have to wait for me, Pellisson,” replied Fouquet with sincere courtesy.

“All the better, Monseigneur; knowing that I’m waiting for you, you’ll be quicker. But beware—there’s a carriage in her courtyard already. Someone’s visiting her.” Fouquet leaned on the door and turned the handle. “Just one more word,” said Pellisson. “In heaven’s name, delay visiting this lady until our return from the Conciergerie.”

“Eh! Five minutes, Pellisson,” replied Fouquet, getting out at the hôtel’s steps.

Pellisson remained slumped in the carriage, scowling.

Fouquet leapt up the stairs and gave his name to the footman, who responded with a respectful eagerness that showed in what regard his name was held by the mistress of the house. “Monsieur le Surintendant!” exclaimed the

marquise, very pale as she approached Fouquet. "What an unexpected honor!" And then, in a whisper, she added, "Beware! Marguerite Vanel is here."

"Madame," replied Fouquet urgently, "I come on business. Just one quick word." And he went ahead into her salon.

Madame Vanel rose from a chair, paler and more livid than Envy herself.

Fouquet made her a most friendly and charming greeting, but in vain; she replied only with a venomous look at the marquise and Fouquet. The piercing look of a jealous woman is a point that finds the chink in every armor, and Marguerite Vanel plunged it into the hearts of the two confidants. She made a bow to her friend, a deeper one to Fouquet, and took her leave, on the pretext that she had ever so many visits to make, without the marquise saying anything to stop her, or Fouquet, preoccupied with anxiety, giving her another

thought.

She was scarcely gone before Fouquet, left alone with the marquise, was on his knees before her without saying a word. "I was waiting for you," said the marquise with a gentle smile.

"If so, you'd have sent that woman away," he said.

"She hadn't been here a quarter of an hour, and I had no idea she was coming tonight."

"Do you love me a little, Marquise?"

"That's not what matters right now, Monsieur, when you're in danger. How are your affairs proceeding?"

"I'm going tonight to rescue my friends from the prisons at the Conciergerie."

"How will you do that?"

"By bribing and suborning the governor."

“He’s a friend of mine; can I help you without harming you?”

“Marquise, that would be a very great help indeed! But how could you assist without compromising yourself? Nothing in my life is worth it, not my power nor my liberty, if it caused a single tear to fall from your eye, or a shadow to darken your brow.”

“Monseigneur, don’t talk that way, it makes my head spin. I’ve long dreamed of helping you without ever counting the cost. In truth, I love you as a dear friend, and as a friend I’m grateful for your delicacy, but never, alas! Never will you find a mistress in me.”

“Ah, Marquise!” cried Fouquet in a desperate voice. “But why?”

“Because you are too well loved by too many people,” whispered the young woman, “because the gleam of fortune and glory hurts my eyes, which are attracted only to melancholy and pain. Because I, who rejected you in your splendor and

magnificence, who scarcely looked at you when you shone, came like a mad woman to throw myself into your arms when I saw dark clouds gather around you. Understand me, Monseigneur, you must become happy again so I can remain chaste in heart and mind—for your misfortune means my ruin.”

“Oh, Madame!” said Fouquet with an emotion deeper than any he’d ever felt before. “If I plunge to lowest level of human misery and hear from you then those words you refuse me now, on that day, Madame, when you forget your noble pride, though you’ll think you’re consoling the most abject of men, you’ll be saying ‘I love you’ to the most ecstatic, triumphant, and happy man in the world!”

He was still at her feet, bathing her hand in kisses, when Pellisson burst in and urgently cried, “Monseigneur! Madame! In God’s name! Forgive me, Monseigneur, but you’ve been here half an hour. Oh, don’t look at me like that—Madame, I beg you, who was that lady who left your house when

monseigneur came in?"

"Madame Vanel," said Fouquet.

"There!" cried Pellisson. "I knew it!"

"Well? What of it?"

"She marched, pale as death, right into her carriage."

"Does it matter?" said Fouquet.

"What matters is what she said to her driver."

"In God's name, what was that?" said the marquise.

"To Monsieur Colbert's," said Pellisson hoarsely.

"Good Lord! Go, Monseigneur! Hurry!" gasped the marquise, almost pushing Fouquet from her salon, while Pellisson drew him by the hand.

"Come, now," said the superintendent. "Am I a child to be afraid of a shadow?"

"You are a giant," said the

marquise, “with a viper trying to bite you on the heel.”

Pellisson practically manhandled Fouquet into the carriage. “Drive hell for leather to the Conciergerie!” cried Pellisson to the coachman.

The horses took off like lightning, and at first nothing could stop them, but in the Arcade Saint-Jean, where they were about to turn onto the Place de Grève, a line of horsemen barred the opening of the narrow street, blocking the superintendent's carriage. There was no way past them and they had to wait until the mounted guards cleared the way, riding after a heavy coach they were escorting toward the Place Baudoyer.

Fouquet and Pellisson took little notice of this event other than to curse the brief delay. They arrived at the gates of the Conciergerie five minutes later. The lieutenant governor was on the steps of the courtyard, but at the name of Fouquet, whispered in his ear by Pellisson, he quickly approached the

carriage and, hat in his hand, bowed deeply and repeatedly. "What an honor for me, Monseigneur!" he said.

"A word with you, Monsieur le Gouverneur. Would you be so kind as to step into my carriage?"

The officer entered the carriage and sat down facing Fouquet. "Monsieur," said Fouquet, "I have a favor to ask of you."

"Speak, Monseigneur!"

"It's a favor that could compromise you, Monsieur, but it will earn you my friendship and protection forever."

"Should you need me to throw myself into a fire, Monseigneur, I'm happy to do it!"

"Good," said Fouquet. "What I'm asking for is very simple."

"It's as good as done, Monseigneur. What do you need?"

"For you to lead me to the cells of Messieurs Lyodot and d'Emerys."

“Would Monseigneur deign to tell me why?”

“I will tell you when we get there, Monsieur, at the same time I give you the wherewithal to compensate for their escape.”

“Escape! Then Monseigneur doesn’t know?”

“What?”

“Messieurs Lyodot and d’Emerys are no longer here.”

“Since when?” gasped Fouquet.

“Since about a quarter of an hour ago.”

“Where did they go?”

“To the dungeon of Vincennes.”

“By what means?”

“By order of the king.”

“No!” cried Fouquet, striking his forehead. “It can’t be!”

And, without saying another word

to the governor, he dismissed him from the carriage, death in his face and despair in his soul.

“What now?” asked Pellisson anxiously.

“What now? Our friends are lost. Colbert is taking them to the dungeons. They were in the coach that passed us at the Arcade Saint-Jean.”

Pellisson fell back as if struck by lightning. He said nothing; a single reproach would have slain his master outright.

“Where to, Monseigneur?” asked the coachman.

“To my house in Paris. You, Pellisson, will go back to Saint-Mandé and return with Abbot Fouquet within the hour. On, driver! On!”

X

Plan of Battle

T

advanced when Abbot Fouquet arrived at his brother's Paris mansion. Fouquet, his brother, and Gourville, pale in the face of future events, looked less like three powerful aristocrats than like three conspirators united by the idea of violence.

Fouquet paced for quite a while, his eyes fixed on the parquet floor, his hands clasped behind his back. Finally, summoning his courage after a great sigh, he said, "Abbot, didn't

you speak to me about a certain group of men you maintain?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the abbot.

"Tell me, who are these people?"
The abbot hesitated. "Come on! Don't worry, I'm not threatening you; give it to me straight, I'm not joking."

"Since you ask for the truth, Monsieur, here it is: I have a hundred and twenty soldiers of fortune who are as bound to me as a thief is to the gallows."

"And you can count on them?"

"Entirely."

"And they won't compromise you?"

"My name will never be mentioned."

"And these are men of firm resolve?"

"They would burn all Paris if I promised them they could get away with it."

"The thing I need to ask of you,

Abbot," said Fouquet, wiping the sweat beading his face, "is to have your one hundred twenty men attack those I designate at a given moment. Is that possible?"

"It won't be the first time they've done such a thing, Monsieur."

"Good; but would these bandits be willing to fight ... an armed force?"

"That's what they're used to doing."

"Then gather your hundred and twenty men, Abbot."

"Fine; just tell me where."

"On the road to Vincennes, tomorrow, at two o'clock sharp."

"To liberate Lyodot and d'Emerys? It will come to blows."

"Quite a few. Does that bother you?"

"Not me, though it might bother you."

"Will your men know their

business?”

“They’ll know what to do, and they’ll know what it’s about—they’re too savvy not to. But a minister who incites a riot against his king ... is taking a risk.”

“What do you care, so long as I pay for it? Besides, if I fall, you go down with me.”

“Then it might be wiser not to cause trouble, Monsieur, and to let the king have his little victory.”

“You should consider, Abbot, that Lyodot and d’Emerys imprisoned at Vincennes is the prelude to the ruin of my house. I repeat, when I’m arrested, you’ll be imprisoned, and when I’m imprisoned, you’ll be exiled.”

“Monsieur, I am at your orders. Do you have any to give me?”

“As I said: tomorrow I want the two financiers they intend to make scapegoats, when there are so many real criminals unpunished, liberated

from the fury of my enemies. Take your measures accordingly. Is this feasible?"

"It's feasible."

"Tell me your plan."

"It is simplicity itself. At an ordinary execution, the guard is a dozen archers."

"Tomorrow there will be a hundred."

"My guess is it will be closer to two hundred."

"Then your hundred and twenty will be outnumbered?"

"Not at all. In every crowd of ten thousand spectators there are a thousand thugs and cutpurses, but they don't dare start anything."

"Well?"

"So, tomorrow on the Place de Grève, which I choose for my field of battle, my one hundred and twenty will be joined by a thousand

auxiliaries. We will start the attack and they will finish it.”

“Good! But how will you get the prisoners from the Place de Grève?”

“We’ll barricade them in one of the houses surrounding the square, so that getting them out again will take a siege. Now that I think of it, here’s an even better idea: some of those houses have two exits, one onto the Place and the other onto the Rue de la Mortellerie, Vannerie, or Tixeranderie. The prisoners will go in one door and out the other.”

“You’ll need to pick the appropriate house.”

“I’ll find it.”

“Ah, but I’ve found it already!” said Fouquet. “Listen carefully to the details.”

“I’m listening.”

Fouquet made a sign to Gourville, who appeared to understand. “One of my friends occasionally lends me the keys to a house he rents on Place

Baudoyer. It has gardens that extend behind a certain house on the Place de Grève.”

“That sounds like the ticket,” said the abbot. “Which house?”

“A busy little cabaret under the sign of Our Lady’s Portrait.”

“I know it,” said the abbot.

“This cabaret has windows on the Place and a back door onto a courtyard, which has a gate into my friend’s garden.”

“Good!”

“Burst into the cabaret, bring in the prisoners, then have your men defend the front door while you escort the escapees through the garden to the Place Baudoyer.”

“Truly, Monsieur, if you were a general, you’d be the equal of Monsieur le Prince.”

“Have you got it?”

“Perfectly.”

“How much cash do you need to juice your men with wine and grease their palms with gold?”

“Oh, Monsieur, how crude! Suppose they heard you? They’re really quite sensitive, you know.”

“They must be ready to storm the heavens from earth, for tomorrow I fight against the king, and when I fight, I intend to win, do you understand me?”

“It will be just as you say, Monsieur. Now, are there any other details?”

“I leave them up to you.”

“Then open your purse, Monsieur.”

“Gourville, issue the abbot a hundred thousand livres.”

“Good! Spare no expense, I think you said?”

“Spare nothing and no one.”

“As you command!”

“Monseigneur,” warned Gourville,

“if this gets out, it will cost us our heads.”

“Don’t be pathetic, Gourville,” retorted Fouquet, purple with anger. “Speak for yourself, mon cher. As for me, my head is firmly fixed on my shoulders. Let’s see, Abbot, is that everything?”

“Everything.”

“At two o’clock tomorrow, then?”

“At noon, because we now must make some preparations in advance.”

“True enough. Don’t spare the innkeeper’s wine.”

“I will spare neither his wine nor his house,” sneered the abbot. “I’ve got this covered, I tell you; leave me to do my work, and you’ll see.”

“Where will you be located?”

“Everywhere, and nowhere.”

“And how will I stay informed?”

“By a courier whose horse will be posted in your friend’s garden. By the

way, what's your friend's name?"

Fouquet looked at Gourville, who came to his master's rescue. "The place is all that matters, Monsieur l'Abbé: Our Lady's Portrait in front, and the only garden in the neighborhood behind."

"Fine, fine. I'll tell my soldiers."

"Go with him, Gourville, and see that he gets his money," said Fouquet. "But wait a moment, Gourville—Abbot, what shall we call this uprising?"

"We'll call it just what it is, Monsieur: the Riot."

"Ah, but whose riot? Because if there's any time the people of Paris love their king, it's when he hangs some tax collectors."

"I'll manage that," said the abbot.

"Yes, but it's a key point, and I want to be assured of it."

"All right, one moment ... here's my idea."

“Tell me.”

“My men will shout, ‘Colbert! Long live Colbert!’ and throw themselves on the prisoners as if to tear them to pieces, because hanging is too good for them.”

“Ah, now there’s an idea indeed!” said Gourville. “Peste, what a mind you have, Monsieur l’Abbé!”

“It runs in the family, Monsieur,” said the abbot proudly.

“Ass!” murmured Fouquet. Then, aloud: “It’s ingenious! Do it, but minimize the bloodshed.”

Gourville and the abbot left to attend to their preparations. The superintendent laid down on soft cushions, at first mulling over the sinister plans for the morrow, but then drifting into dreams of love.

XI

The

Cabaret of Our Lady's Portrait

B day, twenty thousand spectators had gathered in the Place de Grève around the two gibbets that had been erected in the plaza between the Quai de la Grève and *the Quai Le Pelletier*, 33 next to each other with their backs

toward the parapet along the river. That morning, all the municipal criers of the good city of Paris had gone back and forth through every quarter, especially the markets and the near suburbs, announcing in their hoarse but indefatigable voices that the king's justice was to be done upon two corrupt officials who'd stolen from the people. And the people, on whose behalf this was done, and who didn't wish to disrespect their king, left their stalls, studios, and workshops so they could show their appreciation for Louis XIV, just like guests who feared it would be rude to turn down an invitation to a banquet.

According to the indictments of the judgment, which the criers pronounced incorrectly but enthusiastically, two thieving tax farmers, frauds, counterfeitters, and embezzlers of the royal funds, were sentenced to undergo capital punishment on the Place de Grève with "Their Names Displayed Above their Heads." As to these names, the indictment didn't mention them, which just inflamed the curiosity of

the Parisians all the more, until an immense crowd awaited the hour of execution with feverish impatience. The news had already spread that the prisoners, transferred to the Château de Vincennes, would be paraded from that prison to the Place de Grève, so *the Faubourg and Rue Saint-Antoine* 34 were also lined with crowds. The population of Paris, in those days of public executions, was divided into two categories: those of mild or timid heart but philosophical mind who preferred to watch the condemned pass by, and those whose hearts hungered for sensation and wanted to see them die.

That morning, Monsieur d'Artagnan, having received his final instructions from the king, and having bade farewell to his friends, the number of which was for the moment reduced to Planchet, had drawn up his plan for the day, as every man must do who counts his minutes as important and expends them accordingly. "Departure is fixed for tomorrow at the crack of dawn, at three in the morning," he said, "so I

have fifteen hours ahead of me. Reckon first the six hours of sleep that are the minimum I require; one hour to dine makes seven; one hour to visit Athos, eight; then two hours slack for the unexpected, which makes a total of ten. That leaves five hours: one hour to ask for money from Monsieur Fouquet and be refused; one hour to get the money from Monsieur Colbert and suffer his questions and grimaces; one hour to sharpen my sword, brush my clothes, and polish my boots. And I still have two hours left over—mordioux! I'm rich, with time to spare!"

And saying this, d'Artagnan felt a strange joy, a youthful glee, a whiff of those happy and carefree times gone by that rose to his head and intoxicated him. "With those two extra hours," said the musketeer, "I'll go to collect my quarterly rent from the innkeeper of Our Lady's Portrait. Three hundred seventy-five livres! God's death, how jolly! It continues to amaze me. If a poor man who had no more than a livre in his pocket found there a livre plus a dozen deniers,

that would be fine and just, but that never happens to the poor. The rich man, on the other hand, makes money with his money without ever touching it. Here come three hundred seventy-five livres as if fallen from the sky. So, I'll go to Our Lady's Portrait and drink a glass of Spanish wine with my tenant, who can scarcely fail to offer it to me.

“But all things in their time, Monsieur d'Artagnan, and everything in its order. Let's plan this out properly. Article One: Athos. Article Two: Our Lady's Portrait. Article Three: Monsieur Fouquet. Article Four: Monsieur Colbert. Article Five: supper. Article Six: clothes, equipment, horses, and baggage. Article Seventh and Last: sleep!”

And having settled on his plan, d'Artagnan went straight to call upon the Comte de La Fère, to whom, modestly and simply, he related his latest adventures. Since the day before, Athos had been more than a little concerned about d'Artagnan's visit to the king, but two sentences of

explanation settled his mind. Athos guessed that Louis had entrusted d'Artagnan with some important mission and didn't even try to get him to divulge its secret. He advised him to take care of himself, and discreetly offered to go with him if that was advisable.

"But, dear friend, I'm not going anywhere," said d'Artagnan.

"Really! You come to say goodbye but you're not leaving?"

"Oh, all right, fine," replied d'Artagnan, coloring a little. "I'm going to look at some properties."

"Ah, that's another thing entirely. In that case, instead of, 'Don't get killed,' I'll say, 'Don't get robbed.'"

"I'll let you know, old friend, if I find anything worth looking at, because in that case I'll want your advice."

"Yes, of course," said Athos, too considerate to allow himself the amusement of a smile.

Raoul imitated the paternal reserve. D'Artagnan understood that it would be overly mysterious to leave his friends for a journey without telling them which way he'd be going. "I'm going through Le Mans," he said to Athos. "Do you know that country?"

"I do, mon ami," replied the count, without mentioning that Le Mans was in nearly the same direction as the Touraine and if he waited a couple of days, he could travel that way with a friend.

But d'Artagnan was too embarrassed to continue, finding he just dug himself deeper into his hole with each new explanation. Finally, he said, "I'm leaving tomorrow at dawn. Until then, Raoul, will you spend the time with me?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier," said the young man, "unless the count has something he wants me to do."

"No, Raoul, the only thing I have today is an audience with Monsieur, the king's brother," said Athos.

Raoul asked Grimaud for his sword, and he brought it right away. "Then, adieu, dear friend!" said d'Artagnan, opening his arms to Athos. They held for a long embrace, and then the musketeer, mindful of his friend's discretion, whispered in his ear, "An affair of State!"

Athos replied to this with a final, significant handshake.

And so, they parted. Raoul took his old friend's arm and they went east down the Rue Saint-Honoré. "I will lead you to the altar of *the god Pluto*," 35 said d'Artagnan to the young man. "Prepare yourself to see piles of coins. I'm a changed man, by God!"

"Oh! Look how many people there are on the street," said Raoul.

"Is there a parade today?" asked d'Artagnan of a passerby.

"A hanging, Monsieur," replied the stroller.

"Really? A hanging, on the Grève?"

said d'Artagnan.

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Devil take the rogue who gets hanged on the day I have to go to collect my rent!” cried d'Artagnan. “Raoul, have you ever seen a hanging?”

“Never, Monsieur—thank God!”

“That’s youth speaking. Now if you were on guard in a trench, and you caught a spy ... but pardon an old soldier’s rambling, Raoul. You’re quite right, a hanging is an ugly thing. ...If you please, Monsieur, at what hour is the execution?”

“Monsieur,” replied the burgher, charmed at being the object of conversation of two men of the sword, “it’s set for three o’clock.”

“Ah, then we still have an hour and a half. Let’s pick up the pace and get there in time to collect my three hundred seventy-five livres and get away again before the hangman’s customer arrives.”

“Two customers, Monsieur,” added the burgher. “They’re hanging a pair.”

“A thousand thanks to you, Monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, who’d become more careful about his manners as he’d matured. And hustling Raoul along, he made his way rapidly toward the Place de Grève.

Without the musketeer’s experience of dealing with crowds, and a wrist of steel backed by strapping shoulders, neither of the two would have reached their destination. They abandoned the Rue Saint-Honoré, where Athos lived, and followed the quay along the river. D’Artagnan went first: his wrist, elbow, and shoulder formed three corners of a wedge that he knew how to thrust into a mob to get it to split apart like a block of wood. Occasionally he added the persuasion of the pommel of his sword, pushing it between the ribs of recalcitrants and using it to pry them apart, separating husband from wife, uncle from nephew, and brother from

brother. The musketeer did all this so naturally and with such a friendly grin that one would have had to have a broken rib not to forgive him, or a heart of granite not to be charmed by his smile.

When they arrived within sight of the pair of gallows, Raoul turned his head aside in disgust. But d'Artagnan had no eyes for the gibbets; all his attention was focused on his crooked-gabled house with its windows on the plaza. He saw in the square and around the houses lining it a number of off-duty musketeers, who, some with women on their arms, others with friends, were awaiting the hour of the ceremony. What delighted him most was that his tenant, the innkeeper, was so busy he hardly knew which way to turn. Three potboys weren't nearly enough to serve all the drinkers, who overflowed its common room, ground floor parlors, and court. D'Artagnan pointed out this flood of customers to Raoul and said, "That buffoon will have no excuse not to pay his quarterly rent. Look at all those

drinkers, Raoul, spending freely. Mordieux! What a prime location.”

D’Artagnan nonetheless succeeded in catching the host by the corner of his apron and drawing attention to himself. “Ah, Monsieur le Chevalier!” said the innkeeper, badly distracted. “Half a minute, if you will! I’ve got a hundred customers crazy to plunder my cellar.”

“The cellar, fine, but not the strongbox.”

“Oh, Monsieur, your thirty-seven-and-a-half pistoles are already counted out in my office, but there are a dozen people lining the windows up there and emptying a cask of port I broke out this morning for them.... Just give me a minute, a single minute.”

“Go, do it.”

“I’m leaving,” said Raoul in an undertone to d’Artagnan. “This festival is ... ignoble.”

“Monsieur,” d’Artagnan replied

severely, "you will do me the favor to stay right here. A soldier has to be familiar with such spectacles. Youth is the time to see such sights, for you won't know your true worth until you can view coarse and terrible things without letting them harden your heart. Besides, Raoul, would you abandon me to this? You'd just be sorry later. Here, let's go through to the courtyard in back, where there's a tree with some shade. Come sit with me where we can breathe air clear of the fumes of spilled wine."

The two latest guests of Our Lady's Portrait sat themselves where they could hear the ever-increasing noise of the crowd without losing sight of the drinkers seated at the cabaret's tables and overflowing its ground floor parlors. If d'Artagnan had been looking for a place from which to survey the field of battle, as he thought of his real estate, he could hardly have chosen better. The tree under which he and Raoul were sitting half-concealed them under its low boughs, shading a tumbledown table too broken for the drinkers to

balance their glasses on it.

As mentioned, from this post d'Artagnan could see everything. He watched the potboys passing back and forth, and the arrival of new drinkers, and the welcome—sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile—accorded to the newcomers by those already settled in place. He was watching at first just to pass the time, because his thirty-seven-and-a-half pistoles were a long time in coming. Raoul brought up the delay: “Monsieur,” he said, “if you don’t get your tenant to make haste, the, er, customers will arrive, and after that we’ll be hard pressed to get away again.”

“You’re right,” said the musketeer. “Holà! Hey, somebody! Mordieux!”

But though he shouted and pounded on the ramshackle table until it fell into splinters, no one came. D'Artagnan was preparing to get up and go demand an explanation from the innkeeper when the gate to the garden behind the courtyard

opened, screaming on its rusty hinges, and a cavalier came through. He was carrying a sword, sheathed but not on his belt; he cast an anxious glance at d'Artagnan and his companion, and without closing the gate he crossed the courtyard and went into the cabaret, looking suspiciously at everybody and everything.

“So, my two tenants communicate,” said d'Artagnan. “It’s probably just someone curious about the hanging.”

But just then the shouts and loud talk from the drinkers in the upper room came to a sudden halt. In this situation, silence was a far stranger circumstance than an increase of noise. D'Artagnan suddenly wanted to know the cause of this silence. He saw then that the man in the cavalier outfit had gone into the common room and was haranguing the drinkers, who listened to him attentively. D'Artagnan couldn't quite hear this speech due to the roar of the crowd, which overwhelmed the words of the orator. But it soon came

to an end, and then all the men in the common room went out in small groups, one after another, until only a half dozen remained upstairs. One of these six, the cavalier with the sword, took the innkeeper aside and engaged him in what looked like a serious talk, while the others built up the fire in the hearth—a strange thing to do, given the warmth of the weather.

“It’s funny,” said d’Artagnan to Raoul, “but I think I recognize some of those men.”

“How, by their smell?” coughed Raoul. “All I can smell is smoke.”

“I think it smells more like a conspiracy,” said d’Artagnan.

He’d scarcely spoken when four of the men came out into the rear courtyard and, while maintaining a careless attitude, took up sentry positions by the garden gate, occasionally casting glances toward d’Artagnan that he found significant. “God’s death,” he said to Raoul in a low voice, “there’s something going

on here. Do you have a curious mind, Raoul?"

"Depending on the subject, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"Me, I'm as curious as an old woman. Let's go inside and upstairs; I think we'll see something to suit the curious."

"But you know, Monsieur le Chevalier, I have no desire to be a passive and indifferent spectator of the death of those two poor devils."

"Do you think I do? What am I, a savage? Other business calls. Let's go!"

They went into the cabaret and up to the common room, taking up positions at the front window, which was strangely unoccupied. The two last customers in the room, instead of looking out the window, were still building up the fire. Upon seeing d'Artagnan and his friend come in, one whispered to the other, "Ah ha! Reinforcements."

D'Artagnan nudged Raoul with his elbow. "Yes, mes Braves, reinforcements!" he said. "God's noose, that's a hell of a fire! What are you planning to cook with it?"

The two men burst into jovial laughter, but instead of replying, just threw on more firewood. D'Artagnan continued to watch them. "Say," remarked one of the fire-builders, "I guess you're here to tell us when it's time, is that it?"

"Exactly," said d'Artagnan, in hopes of learning what was going on. "Why else would I be here?"

"In that case, you'd better go back to the window," was the reply.

D'Artagnan smiled into his mustache, made a sign to Raoul, and leaned casually on the windowsill.

XII

“Long Live Colbert!”

T presented itself on the Grève at that moment was frightful. The heads of the crowd, ^{he} dwindling in perspective, ^{spectacle, that} extended across the plaza like ears of corn in a vast field. From time to time an unexplained noise or a distant roar made heads bob and thousands of eyes flash. Now and then there were great rolling waves like those on the

ocean, sweeping from the edges toward the center, moving like tides to splash on the breakwater of archers that surrounded the gibbets. Then the hafts of halberds fell on the heads and shoulders of the more reckless spectators, and sometimes it was even steel rather than wood, and in that case an empty circle opened around that guard, a gap that compressed those beyond its edge, pressing the crowd against the parapets along the Seine.

From the upper window, which overlooked the entire square, d'Artagnan saw, with inner satisfaction, that the off-duty musketeers and guards in the crowd knew how to make room for themselves with their fists and sword pommels. He noted with approval that they'd succeeded in forming a coherent group of about fifty men, thanks to the esprit de corps that doubles a soldier's strength. And he was pleased to see that, beyond a dozen or so outliers scattered through the crowd, the group was holding together and was within

range of his voice.

But it wasn't only the musketeers and guards who attracted d'Artagnan's attention. Around the gallows, and especially near the Arcade Saint-Jean, swarmed a busy mass of burly roughnecks, men with tough faces purposefully gathering from among the distracted spectators. Signals were exchanged as they met and shook hands. D'Artagnan noticed among the most active members of this group the cavalier he'd seen come in through the garden gate and go upstairs to harangue the drinkers. This man was organizing squads and issuing orders.

"Mordioux!" said d'Artagnan. "Now I recognize him, and no mistake: it's Menneville. What the devil is he doing here?"

A muffled roar, gradually increasing, drew his attention in another direction: the prisoners were arriving. A strong picket of archers preceded them and took up positions at the entrance of the arcade. The

whole crowd cried out, their voices combining into an immense roar. D'Artagnan saw Raoul go pale and smacked him roughly on the shoulder.

At the sound of this great cry, the fire-stokers turned and called to ask what was happening. "The condemned have arrived," said d'Artagnan.

"Good," they replied, building the fire even higher.

D'Artagnan cast a worried look at them; it was obvious that men who made such a huge fire for no apparent reason were up to something—but what?

The condemned prisoners entered the Place. They walked on foot, the executioner leading them, fifty archers marching to their left and right. Both were dressed in black and appeared pale but resolute. They lifted their heads as they walked, looking up and ahead. D'Artagnan noticed this: "Mordioux!" he said. "They're in a strange hurry to see the gallows."

Raoul recoiled from the sight, though he lacked the strength to leave the window entirely. Even terror has its attractions.

“Death! Death!” cried twenty thousand voices.

“Death to the thieves!” cried the hundred roughnecks, louder than anyone.

“To the rope! String them up!” cried the surging crowd. “Long live the king!”

“The king?” murmured d’Artagnan. “That’s funny, I’d think it’s Monsieur Colbert who’s hanging these men.”

Just then a great rolling wave in the crowd stopped for a moment the march of the condemned. The gang of toughs d’Artagnan had noticed had managed, by dint of pushing and pummeling, in nearly reaching the line of archers.

The procession resumed its march. Suddenly, to cries of “Long live Colbert!”, the roughnecks d’Artagnan

was watching threw themselves upon the escort, who tried in vain to drive them back. Behind the toughs surged the crowd. Then came a frightful commotion with an awful din. This time, in addition to shouts of excitement there were cries of pain. The halberds began to come down, swords began to thrust, muskets to fire. D'Artagnan couldn't make out what was going on in the middle of this confusion until suddenly the chaos began to resolve into purposeful action.

The condemned had been torn from the guards' hands and were being hustled toward Our Lady's Portrait. The tough customers who dragged them along were shouting, "Long live Colbert!" The people hesitated, unsure whether to fall on the archers or the roughnecks. What decided them was when the men shouting, "Long live Colbert!" began crying, "No hanging! Down with the gallows! Burn the thieves! Burn the embezzlers!" These cries were greeted with a rising enthusiasm. The crowd had come to see an execution

and now had the chance to perform one themselves. This was an agreeable change for the populace, so they quickly took the side of the ruffians against the archers, and the shout of the minority soon became that of the majority: "Yes, yes, burn the thieves! Long live Colbert!"

"God's death!" said d'Artagnan. "This is beginning to look serious."

One of the fire-stokers came to the window carrying a flaming brand. "Ah ha!" he said. "Things are heating up!" He turned to his companion and called, "That's the signal!" And he suddenly plunged his firebrand against the wall's wooden baseboard.

Our Lady's Portrait was no new structure, and its aged wood needed little persuasion to catch fire. Within seconds the boards were aflame, and sparks were rising and spreading. A roar from outside responded to the cries from the arsonists.

D'Artagnan, who'd been engrossed by the scene out the window, suddenly felt the heat of the flames

and choked on the smoke. “Holà!” he cried, turning around. “What are you doing with that fire? Are you out of your minds?”

The two men stared at him in astonishment. “What do you mean?” they said to d’Artagnan. “Isn’t this the plan?”

“That’s the plan? To burn down my house?” shouted d’Artagnan. And he grabbed the firebrand from the arsonist’s hand and smashed it into his face. The second thug started to come to his friend’s aid, but Raoul grabbed him, lifted him up and threw him out the window, while d’Artagnan threw the first thug down the stairs. Raoul, who’d finished first, wrenched the burning baseboard from the wall and threw it smoking into the middle of the room.

At a glance, d’Artagnan saw there was nothing more to fear from the fire and dashed back to the window. The riot was at its height; everywhere people were shouting, “Burn them! Kill them! Hang them! Burn them at

the stake! Long live Colbert and long live the king!"

The group carrying the condemned away from the archers was approaching the cabaret, which appeared to be their goal. Menneville was at the head of the group, shouting louder than anyone, "Into the fire! Into the fire! Long live Colbert!"

D'Artagnan began to understand: they intended to burn the condemned men and his house was to be the inferno. "Stop there!" he shouted, sword in hand and one foot on the windowsill. "Menneville, what are you trying to do?"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" cried the latter. "Make way, make way!"

"Into the fire! Burn the thieves! Long live Colbert!" cried the crowd.

These shouts exasperated d'Artagnan. "Mordieux!" he snarled. "To burn those poor devils when they were only condemned to be hanged is monstrous!"

Menneville and his men, dragging the convicts, were only ten paces from the door, but in front of the entrance, the mass of curious people pressed up against the wall was so thick that it barred the way. Menneville made a final effort, shouting "Make way! Make way!" and waving his pistol.

"Burn them!" chanted the crowd. "Set fire to Our Lady's Portrait! Burn the thieves! Burn them both in Our Lady's Portrait!"

There could no longer be any doubt: it was d'Artagnan's house they planned to burn. D'Artagnan remembered the old rallying cry he'd always been able to depend upon, and shouted in a voice like a giant, "To me, Musketeers!" He had one of those voices that carry over cannon fire, the sea, and storms. "To me, Musketeers!"

And, balancing on the windowsill, d'Artagnan leapt down into the crowd, which began to draw back from this house that rained men. Raoul

followed, also with sword in hand. All the musketeers in the Place heard his call, turned and recognized d'Artagnan. "The captain! To the captain!" they cried with one voice. And the crowd opened before them as the sea does before the prow of a ship.

At that moment d'Artagnan and Menneville found themselves face to face. "Make way! Make way!" shouted Menneville, seeing he was within arm's-reach of the door.

"No one gets by," said d'Artagnan.

"Take this, then!" said Menneville, and leveled his pistol at point-blank range.

But before the hammer came down, d'Artagnan knocked up his arm with his sword's forte, then turned the blade and ran the point through his body. "I told you to stay out of trouble," d'Artagnan said as Menneville fell at his feet.

"Make way! Make way!" cried Menneville's companions, who were

frightened at first, but reassured when they saw they had only two men to deal with.

But those two men were like giants with a hundred arms, their blades flickering in their hands like the flaming sword of the archangel. They pierced with the point, struck with the flat, and cut with the edge. Every blow took down a man. "For the king!" cried d'Artagnan with every man he struck, and every man fell. That call became the watchword of the musketeers, who, guided by it, cut their way to d'Artagnan.

Meanwhile the archers recovered from their reversal, charged the gang of roughnecks and, grinding like millstones, crushed and shot down all opposition. The crowd, seeing swords flashing and blood spattering, recoiled upon itself. And then the cries for mercy rose from the vanquished, and the convicts fell back into the hands of the archers.

D'Artagnan then approached the condemned men, and seeing them

pale and terrified, he said, "Console yourselves, Messieurs, you won't be tortured by these ruffians. The king has sentenced you to be hanged, and hanging is all you have to fear."

Our Lady's Portrait was out of danger: for lack of water, the fire had been put out with two barrels of wine. The conspirators had fled through the garden, and the archers took the condemned back to the gallows.

After that, the affair didn't take long to reach its conclusion. The executioner, hurriedly skipping his usual routines, hastily sent the two wretches to their fates.

Meanwhile, a crowd gathered around d'Artagnan, admiring and congratulating him. He wiped his forehead dripping with sweat, his sword dripping with blood, and shrugged his shoulders at seeing Menneville at his feet writhing in his final agonies. While Raoul looked compassionately away, d'Artagnan gestured from his musketeers toward the gallows, laden with their sad fruit.

“Poor devils!” he said. “I hope they died blessing me, for I saved them from a more dreadful fate.”

These words reached Menneville just as he drew his final breath. A dark and ironic response trembled on his lips, and he tried to reply, but the effort cost him his life. He died.

“Oh, this is frightful,” murmured Raoul. “Let’s go, Monsieur le Chevalier.”

“Are you wounded?” asked d’Artagnan.

“No, thankfully.”

“Good! You’re a brave lad, mordieux! You have your father’s wits and Porthos’s arm. Ah, if Porthos had been here, then we’d have seen some fine fighting!”

Then, as if that brought the subject to mind, he murmured, “But where the devil is my brave Porthos?”

“Come, Chevalier, let’s go,” insisted Raoul.

“One more minute, mon ami—just let me collect my thirty-seven-and-a-half pistoles and I’m yours. It’s a profitable property,” added d’Artagnan as he reentered Our Lady’s Portrait, “but I wish it was in a different neighborhood, even if it that would make it less profitable.”

XIII

***H**ow a
Diamond
that
Belonged to
Monsieur
d'***E***merys
Found its*

Way into d'Artagnan's *H*ands

W

cacophonous and bloody scene was playing out on the Grève, several men, barricaded behind the cabaret's garden gate, slammed their swords back in their sheaths and helped one of their number leap onto a waiting horse. Then, like a flock of frightened birds, they scattered in all directions, some climbing the walls, others rushing through doors with the recklessness of panic.

The one who mounted the horse plied his spurs with such brutality that the animal nearly broke through the wall before getting out the back

gate. This rider then crossed the Place Baudoyer like a flash of lightning through the people crowding the neighboring streets, trampling or overturning anyone who got in his way, and ten minutes later arrived at the gate of the superintendent's house, more breathless than his horse. Abbot Fouquet, at the sound of horseshoes ringing on pavement, appeared at a window overlooking the courtyard, and before the rider's foot even touched the ground he leaned out and asked, "Well, Danicamp?"

"It's all over," said the horseman.

"Over!" said the abbot. "Then they're saved?"

"No, Monsieur," replied the rider. "They're hanged."

"Hanged!" repeated the abbot, going pale.

A side door suddenly opened and Fouquet entered the room, pale, distraught, lips parted in a cry of pain and anger. Just inside the doorway he

paused, listening to the conversation between the window and courtyard.

“Dogs!” said the abbot. “Didn’t you fight?”

“Like lions.”

“Say rather like cowards.”

“Monsieur!”

“A hundred soldiers of fortune, sword in hand, are a match for a thousand archers in a surprise attack. Where is Menneville, that braggart, who boasted that he would return either victorious or dead?”

“Well, Monsieur, he kept his word! He’s dead.”

“Dead! Who killed him?”

“A demon disguised as a man, a giant armed with ten flaming swords, a madman who at once put out the fire, stopped the riot, and called up a hundred musketeers from the pavement of the Place de Grève.”

Fouquet lifted his head, his brow

dripping with sweat. "Oh! Lyodot and d'Emerys!" he murmured. "Dead! Dead! And I, dishonored."

The abbot turned and, seeing his brother so livid and distressed, said, "Come, now. It's a stroke of fate, Monsieur, and we mustn't take it so hard. If the attempt failed, it's because God...."

"Silence, Abbot! Shut up!" cried Fouquet. "Your excuses are blasphemies. Get that man up here to tell us the details of this horrible event."

"But, Brother...."

"Obey me, Monsieur!"

The abbot beckoned, and a half-minute later the man's footsteps could be heard on the stairs. Meanwhile, Gourville appeared behind Fouquet like the superintendent's guardian angel, pressing a finger to his lips to enjoin him to get control of himself despite his grief. The minister composed his demeanor and assumed what

calmness he could with a heart half broken with pain.

Danicamp came in. "Make your report," said Gourville.

"Monsieur," replied the messenger, "we'd received the order to abduct the prisoners while shouting 'Long live Colbert,' and the condemned were taken."

"To burn them alive, right, Abbot?" interrupted Gourville.

"Yes! Exactly! The orders had been given to Menneville, Menneville knew what had to be done, and Menneville is dead."

This news seemed to reassure Gourville rather than sadden him.

"To burn them alive, yes?" repeated the messenger, as if he doubted that this order could be what was meant.

"Yes, of course, to burn them alive," the abbot brutally repeated.

"Right, Monsieur, right," said the

messenger, looking intently at the faces of his two interrogators to try to understand what they wanted to hear, and how much of the truth it would be to his advantage to recount.

“Now, tell us what happened,” said Gourville.

“The prisoners,” continued Danicamp, “were carried across the Grève, the people in a fury calling for them to be burned rather than hanged.”

“The people had it right,” said the abbot. “Continue.”

“But,” resumed the man, “just as the archers had been driven back, at the moment when the fire was catching in the house designated as the pyre to burn the convicts, a madman, a demon, that giant I spoke of, whom we were told was the owner of the house in question, helped by a young man who was with him, threw the arsonists out the window, summoned the musketeers in the crowd to his aid, and jumped down into the square. There he plied his

sword so desperately that victory went to the side of the archers, the prisoners were recaptured, and Menneville was killed. Once recaptured, the condemned were executed within three minutes.”

Fouquet, despite himself, couldn't keep from uttering a groan.

“And this man, the owner of the house, what was his name?” demanded the abbot.

“I can't tell you, since I never saw him. My post was to remain in the garden, and I stayed at my post until they came to tell me what had happened. I was ordered, once the thing was over, to report to you how it had ended as soon as possible. Following orders, I left at the gallop, and here I am.”

“Very well, Monsieur, we have nothing more to ask of you,” said the abbot shakily, increasingly afraid of the moment when he'd have to face his brother alone.

“Have you received your fee?”

asked Gourville.

“Just the down payment, Monsieur,” replied Danicamp.

“Here are twenty pistoles. Go, Monsieur, and continue to defend, as was done this time, the true interests of the king.”

“Yes, Monsieur,” said the man, bowing and putting the coins into his pocket. Then he went out.

He was scarcely out of the room before Fouquet, who had stood immobile in the background, stepped quickly forward between the abbot and Gourville. Both simultaneously opened their mouths to speak. “No excuses!” Fouquet said. “No recriminations against anyone. If I hadn’t been a false friend, I wouldn’t have trusted anyone else to liberate Lyodot and d’Emerys. I alone am guilty, and to me alone belong the reproaches and the remorse. Leave me, Abbot.”

“However, Monsieur,” replied the latter, “you won’t stop me from

finding the wretch who interceded so effectively on the behalf of Monsieur Colbert. Because if it's good policy to love one's friends well, I think it's no bad thing to pursue one's enemies as fiercely."

"That's enough politics, Abbot; go, I say, and make sure I hear nothing about you until I send for you again. What we need now, with this terrible example before us, are silence and circumspection. No reprisals, Messieurs—I forbid it."

"There are no orders," growled the abbot, "that can prevent me from avenging on the culprit an affront to my family."

"And I tell you," announced Fouquet in that voice of authority to which there is no reply, "that if you have one thought, a single thought, that is not in accord with my will, two hours after you have that thought you will find yourself in the Bastille. Guide your behavior accordingly, Abbot."

The abbot colored but bowed.

Fouquet made a sign to Gourville to follow him and was already on his way to his office when the usher announced, in a loud voice, "Monsieur le Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Who's that?" said Fouquet negligently to Gourville.

"A former lieutenant in His Majesty's Musketeers," replied Gourville in the same tone.

Fouquet didn't even bother to pause, just continued on his way.

"A moment, Monseigneur!" Gourville then said. "Now that I think of it, this brave fellow has left the king's service and has probably come to collect his quarterly pension."

"The devil!" said Fouquet. "Why is he so ill-timed as to do it now?"

"Allow me, Monseigneur, to politely refuse him then; he's a man of my acquaintance, and one who is better, under the current circumstances, to have as a friend than an enemy."

"Answer him however you like,"

said Fouquet.

“What? Mon Dieu!” said the abbot angrily, as full of spite as a man of the Church could be. “Tell him there isn’t any money, especially for musketeers.”

But the abbot had scarcely uttered these imprudent words when the half-opened door swung wide and d’Artagnan appeared. “Eh, Monsieur Fouquet,” he said, “I was well aware there wasn’t any money for musketeers. Which is why I didn’t come to get it, but to be refused—which you’ve done, thank you. I bid you good morning and am off to find Monsieur Colbert.”

And after a rather curt bow, he left.

“Gourville,” said Fouquet, “go after that man and bring him back to me.”

Gourville obeyed, catching up with d’Artagnan on the stairs. D’Artagnan, hearing quick footsteps behind him, turned and saw Gourville. “Mordioux, Monsieur,” he said, “it’s a sad way you gentlemen of finance have of

receiving people these days. I come to Monsieur Fouquet to ask for a sum ordered by His Majesty and am received like a beggar come to ask for alms, or a burglar who comes to steal the silver.”

“But I thought I heard you mention the name of Monsieur Colbert, dear Monsieur d’Artagnan; did you say you’re going to Colbert’s office?”

“Of course, I’m going there, if only to demand satisfaction for people who try to burn my house while crying, ‘Long live Colbert!’”

Gourville perked up his ears. “Oh ho!” he said. “Are you referring to what just happened on the Grève?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“And how did those events concern you?”

“What! How did it concern me? How could it not concern me if Monsieur Colbert wants to turn my house into a funeral pyre?”

“Wait, your house ... you say it was

your house they wanted to burn?”

“Yes, by God!”

“You own the cabaret of Our Lady’s Portrait?”

“Since a week ago.”

“And you were that brave officer, that valiant sword that scattered those who wanted to burn the condemned?”

“My dear Monsieur Gourville, put yourself in my place: I’m a king’s officer and a property owner. As an officer, my duty is to see the king’s orders accomplished. As a property owner, my interest is to not let people burn my house. So, I followed the laws of interest and duty at the same time by restoring Messieurs Lyodot and d’Emerys into the hands of the archers.”

“So, it was you who threw a man out the window?”

“I, myself,” replied d’Artagnan modestly.

“It was you who killed Menneville?”

“I had that misfortune,” said d’Artagnan, bowing like a man being congratulated.

“It was you, in short, who caused the condemned to be hanged?”

“In place of being burned, yes, Monsieur, and I glory in it. I saved those poor devils from a terrible fate. Do you know, Monsieur Gourville, that they wanted to burn them alive? It’s unbelievable.”

“Go, my dear Monsieur d’Artagnan, go,” said Gourville, hoping to spare Fouquet the sight of the man who had caused him such deep sorrow.

“No,” said Fouquet, who had listened from the door to the antechamber. “No, Monsieur d’Artagnan—on the contrary, come in.”

D’Artagnan wiped a drop of blood that he’d missed from his sword pommel and returned. There he found

himself face to face with three men whose faces bore very different expressions: anger from the abbot, confusion from Gourville, and dejection from Fouquet.

“Excuse me, Monsieur le Ministre,” said d’Artagnan, “but time is pressing. I must see the intendant to explain myself to Monsieur Colbert and collect my quarterly pay.”

“But, Monsieur,” said Fouquet, “there is money here.”

D’Artagnan, astonished, stared at the superintendent.

“You have been mistreated, Monsieur—I know, for I heard it,” said the minister. “A man of your merit should be well received by everyone.”

D’Artagnan bowed.

“Do you have an order of payment?” added Fouquet.

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Give it to me and I’ll pay it myself. Come.” He made a sign to

Gourville and the abbot to remain in the antechamber and took d'Artagnan into his office. Once within, he said, "How much are you owed, Monsieur?"

"Well ... five thousand livres, Monseigneur."

"For a year's salary?"

"For one quarter."

"Five thousand livres for a quarter!" said Fouquet, giving the musketeer a much closer look than before. "Is the king paying you twenty thousand livres a year?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, twenty thousand livres. Do you think it's too much?"

"Me!" said Fouquet, and he smiled bitterly. "If I knew anything about men, if I was, instead of being frivolous, inconsequential, and vain, of a mind that was prudent and wise—if I was, in short, able to arrange my affairs properly, you wouldn't receive twenty thousand livres a year, but a hundred thousand, and you

wouldn't belong to the king, but to me!"

D'Artagnan blushed slightly. There is sometimes in the way that a compliment is paid, in the voice of the admirer, in his affectionate tone, a poison so sweet that even the strongest may succumb to it.

The superintendent followed this speech by opening a drawer with a flourish and drawing out four rolls of coins, which he placed before d'Artagnan.

The Gascon opened one. "It's gold!" he said.

"It's easier to carry, Monsieur."

"But, Monsieur, this is twenty thousand livres."

"Quite so."

"But I'm owed only five."

"I wanted to save you the trouble of making more trips to the superintendent."

“You overwhelm me, Monsieur.”

“I do my duty, Monsieur le Chevalier, and I hope you won’t hold a grudge over my brother’s rude reception. He’s a creature of spite and whimsy.”

“Monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, “believe me, nothing would grieve me more than to have to accept your apologies.”

“Then I will stop there, and content myself with asking a favor of you.”

“Of me? Oh, Monsieur!”

Fouquet drew from his finger a diamond ring easily worth a thousand pistoles. “Monsieur,” he said, “this stone was given to me by a childhood friend, a man you have rendered a great service.” His voice nearly choked as he said this.

“A service!” said the musketeer. “Me? I rendered a service to one of your friends?”

“You can’t have forgotten it,

Monsieur, for it happened today.”

“Your friend’s name was ...?”

“Monsieur d’Emerys.”

“One of the condemned?”

“Yes, one of the victims.... Well! Monsieur d’Artagnan, in recognition of the service you rendered him, I beg you to please accept this diamond. Do it for my sake.”

“Monsieur....”

“Accept it, I say. Today is a day of mourning for me—later you may understand why. Today, I lost one friend, but, well, perhaps I can find another.”

“But, Monsieur Fouquet....”

“Adieu, Monsieur d’Artagnan, adieu!” said Fouquet, his heart in his mouth. “Or rather, au revoir!”

And the minister left his office, leaving in the hands of the musketeer the ring and twenty thousand livres.

“My faith!” said d’Artagnan after a

moment of gloomy reflection. "How am I supposed to make sense of this? Mordieux! All I know is that there goes a very gallant man. Now to go and sort things out with Monsieur Colbert."

And he went out.

XIV

Concerning
the **N**otable
Differences
d'Artagnan
Found
Between the
Intendant

and the Superintendent

M

lived in Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs in a house that had once belonged to **Bautru**. ³⁶ On d'Artagnan's legs he made it in a quarter-hour. When he arrived at the new favorite's house, the courtyard was full of archers and neighborhood watchmen come either to congratulate him or to make their excuses, depending on whether they thought he'd praise or blame them. The urge to flatter is a survival instinct in the oppressed; it's a natural sense, like that of hearing and smell in a wild animal. These watchmen, or their leader, sensed there was an opportunity to gratify Monsieur Colbert by reporting to him how his name had been invoked during the riot.

D'Artagnan arrived and stood near the door, behind the archers, just as the Chief of the Watch was making his report. This officer drew Colbert aside, despite the intendant's reluctance and the furious frown of his beetling brows. "In the event, Monsieur," the chief said, "that you really wanted the people to inflict justice on the two traitors, it would have been a good idea to warn them, because, though we'd hate to displease you, Monsieur, we had our orders to go through with the execution."

"Triple fool!" replied Colbert angrily, shaking his mane of black hair. "What are you saying? That I wanted to cause a riot? Are you drunk, or are you mad?"

"But, Monsieur, everyone was shouting, 'Long live Colbert!'" replied the chief, deeply dismayed.

"A handful of conspirators...."

"No, much more, a huge crowd of people!"

“Oh, really, now,” said Colbert, exasperated. “A crowd of people cried, ‘Long live Colbert!’ Be certain of what you’re saying, Monsieur.”

“All one had to do was open his ears, or rather cover them, the cries were so terrible.”

“And you say these were the people, the true people?”

“Absolutely, Monsieur—assuming the true people could beat us up.”

“Ah, is that so?” said Colbert thoughtfully. “So, you thought those must have been citizens who wanted to burn the condemned?”

“Oh, yes, Monsieur!”

“That’s different, then ... and you fought back bravely?”

“Three of our men were trampled, Monsieur.”

“You didn’t kill anyone, I hope?”

“A few rioters were left on the square, Monsieur, including one who

wasn't a commoner."

"Who?"

"A certain Menneville whom the police have had their eyes on for a while."

"Menneville!" cried Colbert. "The same man who, in the Rue de la Huchette, killed a brave fellow who'd asked for a plump chicken?"

"Yes, Monsieur, the same."

"And this Menneville was one of those who cried, 'Long live Colbert'? Wasn't he?"

"Louder than anyone—like a madman."

Colbert's forehead furrowed darkly. The glow of successful ambition that had lit up his face went out like a firefly crushed underfoot. "Why, then, did you say," continued the intendant slowly, "that the movement sprang from the people? Menneville was my enemy; I would have hanged him if I could, as well he knew; and Menneville belonged to Abbot

Fouquet. This whole affair originated with Fouquet—didn't you know the condemned were his childhood friends?"

That's true, thought d'Artagnan, and that makes matters clear. As clear as the fact that Fouquet, no matter what his actions, is still a gallant man.

"And you're sure," continued Colbert, "that this Menneville is dead?"

D'Artagnan decided the moment had come to make his entrance. "Quite dead, Monsieur," he said, stepping forward suddenly.

"So, Monsieur, it's you, is it?" said Colbert.

"In person," replied the musketeer calmly and deliberately. "It seems that you had in this Menneville a nasty little enemy."

"He wasn't my enemy, Monsieur," replied Colbert, "but the king's."

Two-faced animal, thought

d'Artagnan, trying to play the haughty hypocrite with me. Aloud he said, "Well! I'm happy to have rendered the king a service, then. Would you mention it to His Majesty, Monsieur l'Intendant?"

"Are you giving me an assignment, Monsieur? What, exactly, are you directing me to say?" replied Colbert in a voice dripping with hostility.

"I give no assignments," responded d'Artagnan with that calm that is more infuriating than mockery. "I thought it might be convenient for you to inform His Majesty that it was I who, finding myself with the opportunity, rendered justice upon Monsieur Menneville and restored the situation to order."

Colbert turned wide-eyed upon the watchman. "It's true, quite true," the chief said. "Monsieur here was our savior."

"Monsieur, if you'd come to tell me that, why didn't you say so?" Colbert said to d'Artagnan, oozing envy. "That explains everything and makes it

better for you than anyone.”

“You are mistaken, Monsieur l’Intendant, I didn’t come to tell you that.”

“It’s a notable feat nonetheless, Monsieur.”

“Oh, not if one does it often enough,” the musketeer said nonchalantly.

“Then, to what do I owe the honor of your visit?”

“That’s simple enough: the king ordered me to come see you.”

“Ah!” said Colbert, regaining his aplomb as he saw d’Artagnan draw a paper from his doublet. “So, it was to ask me for money?”

“Exactly, Monsieur.”

“Wait a moment, if you please, Monsieur, while I finish with the watchman.”

D’Artagnan turned on his heel rather insolently, and then, finding

himself once more facing Colbert after spinning around, he bowed theatrically *like a Harlequin on a stage* 37 and then marched away toward the door.

Colbert was amazed at this unexpected response. Usually men of the sword, when they came to his office, had such a desperate need for money that until they were paid they seemed rooted to the floor with inexhaustible patience. Was d'Artagnan on his way to the king? Was he going to complain about how badly he'd been received, or tell of today's exploit? It was a matter for urgent and serious thought.

In any event, it had been an ill-chosen moment to dismiss d'Artagnan, whether he came from the king or on his own account. He'd rendered too great a service, and too recently, to be fobbed off like that, so Colbert thought it would be better to drop his haughty tone and recall the musketeer. "Ohé! Monsieur d'Artagnan!" he called. "Are you leaving so soon?"

D'Artagnan turned around. "Why not?" he said serenely. "We don't have anything more to talk about, do we?"

"Don't you at least have money to collect, since you have a bill of payment?"

"Me? Not at all, my dear Monsieur Colbert."

"But, Monsieur, you have a bill! And just as you deliver a sword-thrust when the king requires it, I deliver payment when presented with a royal bill. So, present it."

"No need, my dear Monsieur Colbert," said d'Artagnan, who was enjoying Colbert's discomfiture. "This bill's been paid."

"Paid! By whom?"

"Why, by the superintendent."

Colbert paled. "Explain, then," he said, almost choking, "if it's been paid, why show it to me?"

"As a consequence of the king's

order to which I referred just now, dear Monsieur Colbert. The king ordered me to collect a quarter of the year's salary he's been good enough to offer me."

"Collect it ... from me?" said Colbert.

"Not exactly. The king said, 'Go see Monsieur Fouquet; the superintendent might not have the money, so then go to Monsieur Colbert.'"

Colbert's expression brightened for a moment, but his face was like a permanently stormy sky that was only ever lit by a brief and occasional flash of lightning among the clouds. "And ... the superintendent had the money?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, no shortage of money," replied d'Artagnan. "That must be the case, because Monsieur Fouquet, instead of making my quarterly payment of five thousand livres...."

"A quarterly payment of five thousand livres!" cried Colbert, as

surprised as Fouquet had been by so large a sum designated as a soldier's salary. "Meaning twenty thousand livres a year?"

"Right, Monsieur Colbert. Faith, you calculate like Pythagoras! Yes, twenty thousand livres."

"Ten times the salary of an Intendant des Finances. My compliments to you," said Colbert with a poisonous smile.

"Yes, the king apologized that it wasn't more," said d'Artagnan. "But he promised to make it up later when he was better funded. But time presses, so if we could...?"

"To be clear, despite the king's expectations, the superintendent paid you?"

"Just as, despite the king's expectations, you refused to pay me."

"I didn't refuse you, Monsieur, I asked you to wait a moment. And you say Monsieur Fouquet paid you the entire five thousand livres?"

“Yes, just as you say you would have done ... but he did even better than that, my dear Monsieur Colbert.”

“What did he do?”

“He politely counted out the entire year’s salary, saying that for the king, the coffers were always full.”

“The entire year’s salary! You’re saying Monsieur Fouquet paid you twenty thousand livres instead of five thousand?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“And why was that?”

“To spare me three more visits to the superintendent. So, I have all twenty thousand livres here, in my pocket, in lovely new-minted gold. You see, then, that I can go, since I have no need of you and came solely for form’s sake.”

And d’Artagnan slapped his ringing pockets with a laugh that showed Colbert thirty-two magnificent teeth as white as any twenty-five-year-old’s, and which seemed to say in

their toothy language, "Serve us up thirty-two little Colberts and we'll snap and grind up all of them."

The serpent is as brave as the lion, and the sparrow hawk as courageous as the eagle, it can't be denied. Even those animals we think of as cowards are brave when they must defend themselves, and Colbert wasn't afraid of d'Artagnan's thirty-two teeth. He stiffened and said sharply, "Monsieur, what the superintendent did today, he had no right to do."

"Why do you say that?" replied d'Artagnan.

"Because your bill ... may I see it, please, your bill?"

"Gladly; here it is."

Colbert grabbed the paper with an eagerness that worried the musketeer and made him regret having handed it over.

"Well, Monsieur!" said Colbert. "Your royal order says the following: Upon presentation Monsieur

d'Artagnan is to be paid five thousand livres, which make up one quarter of the annual salary I grant him."

"It says that, in fact," said d'Artagnan, feigning calm.

"Well! The king owed you only five thousand livres—why have you been paid more than that?"

"Because he had more than that and wanted to give it to me. It doesn't concern anyone else."

"It's no surprise that you should be ignorant of the rules of finance," said Colbert with smooth pride, "but tell me, Monsieur, when you owe a thousand livres, what do you do?"

"I never owe anyone a thousand livres," replied d'Artagnan.

"No matter," said Colbert irritably. "If you owe a payment, wouldn't you pay only what you owe?"

"That proves nothing," said d'Artagnan, "except that you have your rules of finance and Monsieur

Fouquet has his.”

“Mine, Monsieur, are the correct rules.”

“I wouldn’t argue that.”

“And you have taken more than was owed you.”

D’Artagnan’s eyes flashed. “I was paid in advance, which I’m sure is what you mean, Monsieur Colbert. For if I’d taken more than I was owed, that would be stealing.”

Colbert didn’t acknowledge this subtlety. “Thus, you have fifteen thousand livres that belong in the king’s coffers,” he said with jealous anger.

“You may record it as credit,” replied d’Artagnan with a hint of irony.

“Not at all, Monsieur.”

“What, then? Do you think to take back those three rolls of coins?”

“You will return them to my

coffers.”

“Me? Oh, Monsieur Colbert, I don’t think so....”

“The king has need of his money, Monsieur.”

“And I, Monsieur, have need of money from the king.”

“Nonetheless, you will return it.”

“Not a chance. I’ve always heard that under the rules of finance, as you put it, a good cashier neither gives back nor takes back.”

“Then, Monsieur, we will see what the king says when I show him this bill that proves that Monsieur Fouquet not only pays for more than he owes, he doesn’t even keep a receipt when he does it.”

“Ah!” hissed d’Artagnan. “Now I understand why you took my bill from me, my dear Monsieur Colbert.”

Colbert didn’t remark the menace behind the way the musketeer pronounced his name. “You’ll soon

see how useful it is,” he said, waving it between his fingers.

“Sa ha!” said d’Artagnan, snatching the paper away with a sudden movement. “I understand already, Monsieur Colbert, and don’t need to wait to learn it.” And he stuffed away the paper he’d seized on the fly.

“Monsieur, Monsieur!” cried Colbert. “Such violence....”

“Come, now! Will you complain of the manners of an ignorant soldier?” replied the musketeer. “I kiss my hands to you, my dear Monsieur Colbert!”

And he went out, openly laughing at the future minister. “Now there was a man who was ready to befriend me,” he said to himself. “It’s a shame I had to put him in his place.”

XV

Philosophy of the *Heart* and Mind

F encountered so many men more dangerous than the intendant, d'Artagnan's ^{or} clash ^a with ^{man} Colbert ^{who'd} just seemed comical to him, so he didn't deny himself the pleasure of laughing at the intendant from the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs all the way to the Rue des Lombards. This took some time, so d'Artagnan had a good, long

laugh. He was still laughing when he came upon Planchet, at the door of his house, also laughing—for Planchet, since the return of his former master and the arrival of the English guineas, spent most of his time doing what d'Artagnan had only done between the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs and the Rue des Lombards.

“Are you home, then, my dear master?” said Planchet to d'Artagnan.

“No, my friend,” replied the musketeer, “I’m away again as soon as I’m able, that is, after I eat and then sleep for five hours. At daybreak I jump into the saddle—did you give my horse a proper feeding?”

“Why, Master,” replied Planchet, “you know very well your horse is the darling of the household. My boys indulge him all day long, sneaking him snacks from my sugar, hazelnuts, and biscuits. You ask if he’s had enough to eat? Ask instead whether he’s been fed to death.”

“Fine, Planchet, fine. On, then, to my concerns: what about supper?”

“It’s ready, mon maître: a roast joint, white wine, steamed crayfish, and fresh cherries.”

“You’re a fine fellow, Planchet! Supper, then, and off to bed.”

During supper, d’Artagnan noticed Planchet rubbing at his forehead, as if trying to focus his thoughts. He looked affectionately at his worthy companion of so many adventures, clinked his glass against Planchet’s and said, “Come, friend Planchet, what are you having such a hard time putting into words? Mordioux! Speak up and say your piece.”

“It looks to me,” said Planchet, “like you’re going on an expedition of some sort.”

“I wouldn’t say no.”

“Then you’ve got some new idea in mind?”

“It’s possible, Planchet.”

“Well, are you in need of capital to back this venture? I’ve got fifty thousand livres to put behind

whatever idea you're exploring." And Planchet rubbed his hands together eagerly.

"There's just one trouble with that, Planchet," replied d'Artagnan.

"What's that?"

"The idea isn't my own, so I can't profit from it."

These words tore a heartfelt sigh from Planchet. Avarice is a seductive advisor; she leads her man as Satan led Jesus to the mountain, shows the unhappy fellow all the realms of the earth, and then retires with a smile, knowing she's leaving her companion, Envy, to gnaw at his heart.

Planchet had tasted easy money and couldn't resist the desire for more of it. But as he was a good-hearted man despite his greed, and as he adored d'Artagnan, he couldn't keep from offering all sorts of careful advice and counsel. He wouldn't have been sorry to get a hint about the secret his master concealed so well, but ruses, clever tricks, and artful

questions were all to no avail; when d'Artagnan had a covert mission, his lips were sealed.

And so, the evening passed. After supper, d'Artagnan turned his attention to his baggage, and then visited the stable, rubbing down his horse and inspecting its legs and tack. Then, having recounted his money, he went to bed, where, turning in like a twenty-year-old, without anxiety or remorse, he was asleep five minutes after blowing out his lamp. There was plenty that might have kept him awake: ideas filled his mind, there were possibilities to consider, and d'Artagnan was a great planner against contingencies, but with that imperturbable calm that, to the man of action, is more valuable than genius, he put off all these considerations until the next day, in hopes, he told himself, of seeing them with fresh eyes in the morning.

The day came. The Rue des Lombards received its share of caresses from rosy-fingered dawn, and d'Artagnan rose with the sun. He

awoke no one, put his saddlebags under his arm, and crept down the staircase without a creak, unnoticed by all those still sonorously snoring from attic to cellar. Then, having saddled his horse, he closed up both shop and stable and set off on his expedition to Brittany.

He'd had good reason the evening before not to think too much about all the political and diplomatic matters his mission touched upon, for now in the twilight and fresh air of morning he felt his ideas ripen and bear fruit. His first stop was in front of Fouquet's house, where he threw into an open delivery box at the superintendent's door the blessed receipt that, the day before, he'd taken such pains to recover from the intendant's crooked fingers. Hidden in an envelope addressed to Fouquet, the note hadn't been noticed by Planchet, though in matters of divination he ranked with *Calchas or Pythia of Apollo*. 38

D'Artagnan had thus returned the receipt to Fouquet without

compromising himself, removing all further need to question his own honor. Having made his restitution, he said to himself, "Let's inhale deeply of the healthy morning air and breathe out all care! Let my horse Zephyr swell his lungs until he's a hemisphere, while I put my mind to ingenious calculations.

"It's time," continued d'Artagnan, "to devise a plan of campaign. Now, according to the methods of Monsieur de Turenne, who has a head positively swelling with ideas, before the plan of campaign it's advisable to consider the enemy generals with whom we'll be dealing. That brings us first to Monsieur Fouquet. And what is Monsieur Fouquet?

"Monsieur Fouquet," d'Artagnan replied to himself, "is a handsome man much loved by women, a gallant man much loved by poets, and a man of wit much hated by fools. As I'm not a woman, a poet, or a fool, I neither love nor hate the superintendent, so I find myself in the same position as *Monsieur de*

Turenne before winning the Battle of the Dunes: 39 he didn't hate the Spanish, but he defeated them soundly anyway. Wait, mordieux, here's an even better example: I'm in the same position as Turenne when he faced the Prince de Condé at Jargeau, at Gien, and at Faubourg Saint-Antoine: he had nothing against Monsieur le Prince, but he was obeying the king. Monsieur le Prince is a charming man, but the king is the king; Turenne just gave a great sigh, said, 'Sorry, my Cousin,' and routed his army.

"Now, what does the king want? That's not my affair. Then, what does Monsieur Colbert want? Ah, that's another matter entirely! He wants whatever Monsieur Fouquet doesn't. And what does Monsieur Fouquet want? That's where it gets serious—because he wants to have everything the king wants."

This monologue concluded, d'Artagnan laughed and twirled his riding crop merrily. He was already trotting along the high road,

scattering the birds from the hedges,
listening to his gold louis jingle with
every bounce, and we must confess,
when d'Artagnan was in that
situation, timidity wasn't one of his
vices. "Come," he said, "this mission
isn't so dangerous! It'll be like that
little show Monsieur Monck took me
to see in London, the one titled '*Much
Ado About Nothing*.'" 40

XVI

Travel

Ftime since we began his life story, this man with a heart of bronze and limbs of steel once more left his home and his friends to seek fortune and face death. The one, that is to say, death, had constantly retreated before him as if afraid; the other, that is to say fortune, had been allied with him for only a month. Although he was no great philosopher, no Epicurus or Socrates, he had a capable mind, honed by a life of activity and thought. One is not as brave, as adventurous, and as adept as d'Artagnan without being at the same time a bit of a

dreamer. He had retained a few of *the maxims of Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld* 41 deemed worthy of being put into Latin by the gentlemen of Port Royal, and he had collected, from the conversation of Athos and Aramis, a fair number of the sayings of Seneca and Cicero as translated by them and applied to the usages of everyday life.

His contempt for wealth, which our Gascon had considered an article of faith for the first thirty-five years of his career, had long been regarded by him as the first commandment in the code of courage. "Article one," he would say, "we are brave because we have nothing, and we have nothing because we despise riches."

And with this leading principle, as we've said, having guided his previous thirty-five years, a d'Artagnan suddenly rich had to wonder whether, despite his wealth, he was still brave. For anyone other than d'Artagnan, the events on the Place de Grève would have sufficed for an answer to that question.

Another's conscience might have been satisfied with that, but d'Artagnan was brave enough to inquire seriously into his bravery.

"It seems to me I drew quickly enough and cut and thrust freely enough on the Place de Grève to be sure of my courage," he said to himself. Then, he replied, "That might sound good, Captain, but it's no answer! I was brave because they threatened to burn my house, and it's a hundred, or even a thousand to one that if the rioters hadn't had that unfortunate idea, their plan of attack would have succeeded, or in any event it wouldn't have been me who thwarted it.

"And who do I have threatening me now? I have no house in Brittany to be burned, and no other treasure at risk. But no! I have my skin, the precious skin of Monsieur d'Artagnan that's worth more than all the houses and treasures in the world, the skin that's worth so much to me because, all things considered, it holds together a body around a warm heart

that's always ready to fight, and therefore to live.

“So, I want to live, and in fact I live more fully and completely now that I'm rich. Who the devil said that money was the ruin of life? It's a lie, upon my soul! It seems to me, on the contrary, that now I enjoy the air and sun twice as much as before. Mordioux! What if I double my fortune again, and trade in this riding crop I hold for a marshal's baton? If that happened, I don't think there'd be enough air and sun for me in the world! And that's by no means out of the question, for who the devil would oppose the king making me a duke and marshal, as his father, King Louis XIII, made a duke and constable out of *Albert de Luynes*? 42 Aren't I as brave, and far smarter, than that imbecile *de Vitry*? 43

“Ah, but that's just the thing that would hold me back—I'm too smart for my own good. Happily, if there's any justice in this world, then fortune will turn my way at some point. I'm certainly owed for everything I've

done for Anne of Austria, given how little she's done in return. But now we're working for a king, and a king who seems to want to reign. God guide him to stay on that path! For if he wants to reign, he'll need me, and if needs me, he'll have to give me what he promised. Air and sun! So, I'm still marching, as I always have, from nothing to everything.

“Only the nothing of today is the everything of before, and that's the thing that's changed. So, let's consider! Just what is the state of my heart? For that's what I was talking about, though I was only considering its former condition.” And the Gascon placed his hand on his chest, as if seeking his heartbeat. “Why, you wretch!” he said with a bitter smile. “You dog! You hoped for a moment that you didn't have a heart, but you do have one, and, terrible servant that you are, it's the heart of a traitor. For you have a heart that speaks to you on behalf of Monsieur Fouquet.

“And what is Monsieur Fouquet, now, in regard to the king? A

conspirator, an actual conspirator, so much so that he didn't even bother to hide from you that he was conspiring. You could have been the blade to cut him down, if his good grace and noble spirit hadn't put you back in your sheath. An armed uprising! For that's no less than what Monsieur Fouquet devised.

"And if the king vaguely suspects Monsieur Fouquet of rebellion, I, in fact, could prove that Fouquet has already shed the blood of the king's subjects. So, let's summarize: I know all this and yet keep silent about it, and why? What more could I want from Monsieur Fouquet than an advance of fifteen thousand livres and a diamond worth a thousand pistoles, along with a smile in which there was as much bitterness as benevolence? Ah, it's that smile for which he owes me his life.

"But now, I hope that this fool of a heart will keep silent and speak to me no more of Monsieur Fouquet," continued the musketeer. "As of now, the king is my sun! We'll hear no

more about Monsieur Fouquet, and anyone who comes between me and my sun must beware! Forward, forward, for His Majesty Louis XIV!”

These reflections were the only impediment delaying d’Artagnan’s travel. Now, his reflections concluded, he picked up his mount’s pace. But as perfect a horse as Zephyr was, he couldn’t trot on indefinitely. The day after his departure from Paris he arrived at Chartres, where d’Artagnan left Zephyr with a friendly innkeeper he knew. From that point on, the musketeer traveled on post horses, employing that mode of locomotion to cross the distance from Chartres to Châteaubriand. In the latter town, far enough from the coast that no one would suspect d’Artagnan of aiming for the ocean, and far enough from Paris that no one might think he came from there as the messenger of Louis XIV, whom d’Artagnan had called his sun all unknowing that he who was still a poor star in the sky of royalty would one day take that day star as his emblem—that messenger of Louis XIV turned in his post horse

and bought a swayback nag, a mount so disreputable that no cavalry officer would appear on it for fear of being dishonored. Except for the color of its coat, this new acquisition reminded d'Artagnan of *the famous yellow horse on which he'd first made his entrance into the wide world.* 44

It would be fair to say that, once he'd mounted his new horse, it was no longer d'Artagnan who was riding forth, but a man dressed in an iron-gray jerkin and brown knee breeches who could pass for either a priest or layman, though closer to a priest, for d'Artagnan had clapped on his head a velour skullcap and topped that with a round black hat. He wore no sword, just a thick stick hung by a cord from his forearm, with as backup a good ten-inch dagger hidden under his cloak. The nag bought at Châteaubriand completed the transformation, a mount called, or rather that d'Artagnan named, "Ferret."

"And if Zephyr has been replaced by the lowly Ferret," d'Artagnan said,

“then my name should diminish as well. So, instead of d’Artagnan I’ll just be plain Agnan, a name that better suits my gray jerkin, round hat, and old skullcap.”

Monsieur Agnan thereafter traveled pretty comfortably upon Ferret, who could trot almost like a real horse, and even at his casual trot was able to make a good twelve leagues a day, thanks to his thin but sinewy shanks, whose virtues the experienced eye of d’Artagnan had detected beneath their coarse and furry coat.

Along the way, the traveler made notes about the cold and severe country he rode across, while searching for a reasonable excuse to visit Belle-Île-en-Mer and take a look around without arousing suspicion. The more he thought about his mission, the more convinced he became of the importance of it. In that remote country, the formerly autonomous Duchy of Brittany, which wasn’t French at that time and is scarcely so today, the people knew

nothing of the King of France. Not only didn't they know him, they didn't want to know him. The only thing a Breton knew of politics was that his former dukes no longer governed him, leaving a void and nothing more.

In place of the old sovereign duke, the parish seigneurs ruled unchecked with above them only God, who has never been forgotten in Brittany. Among those seigneurs of castles and convents, the richest, most powerful, and certainly the most popular was Monsieur Fouquet, Lord of Belle-Île. Even in that country, within actual sight of the mysterious isle, tradition made it the home of legends and wonders. Not everyone could go there: the island, six leagues long by six leagues wide, was a seigneurial property off-limits to the mainlanders, who respected it all the more when it was ruled by *the family de Rais*, ⁴⁵ a name still dreaded in that country.

Sometime after the seigneurie was elevated to a marquisate by Charles IX, Belle-Île had passed to Monsieur

Fouquet. The isle's fame was no recent thing, dating back to farthest antiquity when it had been named Kalonese, from two Greek words meaning "beautiful island." Thus, even eighteen hundred years earlier and in a different language, it had been called by the name it still bore. There was certainly something special about this property of the superintendent's beyond its position six leagues off the coast of France, a location that made it sovereign in its maritime solitude, like a majestic ship that scorned all harbors and cast its anchor in the open ocean.

D'Artagnan learned all this without showing any apparent surprise or even interest. He also learned that the best place to hear news would be at La Roche-Bernard, a good-sized port town at the mouth of the Vilaine. Maybe there he could find a ship. Alternatively, he could cross the salt marshes to Guérande or Croisic and seek there for an opportunity to sail to Belle-Île. He had discovered, since his departure from Châteaubriand, that nothing seemed impossible to

Ferret under the hand of Monsieur Agnan, and nothing Monsieur Agnan couldn't expect from the dependable Ferret. He therefore sat down to dine on some poultry and pie at an inn in La Roche-Bernard, washing them down from its cellar with some local cider, which at first taste he recognized as the most Breton thing he'd yet met.

XVII

How

d'Artagnan

Met a Poet

Who'd

become a

Printer to

Make Sure

his Poems got Printed

Bdine, d'Artagnan first, as was usual with him, gathered all the local information he could, ~~before sitting down to~~ following the axiom of curiosity that says a man who wants to ask questions must first be ready to answer questions himself. So, d'Artagnan sought, with his usual skill, a useful questioner in the inn at La Roche-Bernard.

At the moment, there were two travelers up on the first floor who were either at supper or preparing for it. D'Artagnan had seen their horses in the stable and their baggage in the common room. One traveled with a lackey, which placed him above the common, and two Perche mares, well-kept and well fed, served as their

mounts. The other, a nondescript fellow of meager means, wearing a dusty coat, threadbare stockings, and boots worn more by pavement than by the stirrup, had come from the direction of Nantes in a cart drawn by a horse so much like Ferret, except for its color, that d'Artagnan would have had to search for a hundred leagues to find a closer match. This cart contained a number of bundles covered with old canvas.

“That traveler there,” said d'Artagnan to himself, “is the man for me. He suits me perfectly; now I just have to suit him. Monsieur Agnan, in his gray jerkin and drooping hat, is quite worthy of dining with the gentleman with the old boots and tired nag.”

That decided, d'Artagnan called the innkeeper and ordered him to carry his poultry, pie, and cider up to the room of the humble gentleman. Then, plate in hand, he climbed the wooden staircase to the man's room and knocked on the door. “Enter!” said the stranger.

D'Artagnan entered with a hopeful smile, his plate under his arm, his hat in one hand and a candle in the other. "Excuse me, Monsieur," he said. "I'm a traveler like you, I don't know anyone at this inn, and I have the unfortunate habit of being bored when I must eat alone, so much so that my food seems flat and unappetizing. Your face, which I saw just now when you went down to have your oysters opened for you, your face looks friendly—and besides, I noticed that you have a horse much like mine, and that the host, doubtless also noticing the resemblance, had placed them next to each other in the stable where they seemed to be getting along famously. I don't see, Monsieur, why the masters should be lonely when their horses are in good company. So, I came to ask the favor of sharing your table with you. My name is Agnan, Monsieur Agnan at your service, the unworthy steward of a wealthy seigneur who wants to buy into the local salt-drying works and sent me to inspect his investment. Truly,

Monsieur, I hope my face pleases you as much as yours does me, because I'd be honored to make your acquaintance."

The stranger, whom d'Artagnan now saw closely for the first time, having only glimpsed him before, had shining black eyes, a sallow complexion, a forehead lined by the passage of fifty years, and good-natured features with an intelligent look about them. You'd think this fellow never exercised anything but the upper part of his head, thought d'Artagnan. He's all eyes and brains; his mouth, nose, and chin are insignificant.

"Monsieur," replied the person being considered so closely, "I'd be honored as well, though I'm rarely bored, as my own company always amuses me," he added with a smile. "But no matter, I'm delighted to receive you." However, while saying this the man with the worn boots cast an anxious glance at his table, where his oysters had already disappeared, leaving behind only a slice of salt

bacon.

“Monsieur,” d’Artagnan said quickly, “the innkeeper is coming up with a pretty roast fowl and a fine pie.” For d’Artagnan had read in his companion’s eyes, however briefly, the fear of being taken advantage by a freeloader. He’d guessed rightly, and with his remark the humble traveler’s expression softened.

Right on cue, the innkeeper appeared in the doorway with a pair of dishes. The pie and the poultry having been added to the slice of salt bacon, d’Artagnan and his new acquaintance bowed to each other, sat down face to face, and shared the bacon and other dishes like two brothers.

“Monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, “you have to admit that having a dining companion is a wonderful thing.”

“How so?” asked the stranger around a mouthful of pie.

“Well, I’ll tell you,” replied d’Artagnan. The stranger stopped

chewing so he could hear better. “First of all,” continued d’Artagnan, “instead of each of us dining by the light of only one candle, now we’re lit by two.”

“That’s true,” said the stranger, nodding at the undeniable truth of this.

“Then, I see that you’re fond of my pie, while I, on the other hand, prefer your bacon.”

“That’s also true.”

“Finally, even better than being well illuminated and eating what we prefer, is the pleasure of doing so in company.”

“Truly, you’re a cheerful fellow, Monsieur,” said the friendly stranger.

“But yes, Monsieur! As cheerful as those of us with empty heads always are. Oh, I don’t mean you!” continued d’Artagnan. “I see in your eyes the spark of genius.”

“Oh, Monsieur!”

“Come now, admit something.”

“What?”

“That you’re a scholar.”

“Faith, Monsieur....”

“Aren’t you?”

“Nearly.”

“Ah ha! Near in which direction?”

“I’m an author.”

“There! I knew I was right!” cried d’Artagnan delightedly, slapping his knee. “It’s almost miraculous.”

“Oh, Monsieur....”

“Truly!” continued d’Artagnan. “That I should have the good fortune to spend the evening in the company of an author ... perhaps even a famous one?”

“Oh!” said the stranger, blushing. “Famous, Monsieur, is hardly the word.”

“He’s modest!” cried d’Artagnan,

as if thrilled. "Modest and humble!" Then, turning back to the stranger with an eager familiarity: "But please tell me, at least, the titles of your works, since you didn't tell me your name and I had to guess what you were."

"My name is Jupenet, Monsieur," said the author.

"A distinguished name!" said d'Artagnan. "Distinguished, upon my word. I'm not sure why, and pardon me if this is a mistake, but I'm sure I've heard that name before."

"I've written a few verses," said the poet modestly.

"Well, there you go! I must have read them."

"Plus, a tragedy."

"I must have seen it performed."

The poet blushed again. "I don't think that can be it. My verses haven't yet been printed."

"In that case, I must know your

name from that tragedy.”

“You’re mistaken, I’m afraid, because *the gentleman comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne* 46 turned it down,” said the poet, with a sad smile of a solemnity known only to poets.

D’Artagnan gnawed his lip.

“So, you see, Monsieur,” continued the poet, “you can’t have heard of me, as I’m still completely unknown.”

“I can’t account for it. It seems to me the name of Jupenet is a fine one, entirely worthy of being as well-known as those of *Messieurs Corneille, Rotrou, and Garnier*. 47 I hope, Monsieur, that in place of dessert you will tell me a bit about your tragedy. It will be as good as pudding, mordieux! ...Ah, your pardon, Monsieur, that’s an oath I indulge in because it’s the favorite of my master the seigneur, so sometimes I borrow it, as it must be in good taste. I allow myself that indulgence only in his absence, of course, because you understand that in his presence.... But really, Monsieur, this cider is quite

terrible. Don't you agree? And the carafe is so crooked it wobbles on the table."

"Shall we make it level?"

"Sure, but with what?"

"With this knife."

"And then how will we cut up the roast fowl? Were you thinking of leaving this roast untouched?"

"Oh, by no means."

"Then how will we...."

"With this." The poet fumbled in his pocket and drew out a rectangular bit of cast iron, about an inch and a half in length. But scarcely had the metal rectangle seen the light of day before the poet seemed to think he'd been incautious and made a move to return it to his pocket.

But d'Artagnan had noticed it—he was a man who missed nothing—and reached for the bit of iron. "That's interesting, what is it?" he said. "May I see it?"

“Certainly,” said the poet, who repented of his urge to conceal it. “Of course—but if I let you see it,” he said a trifle smugly, “you have to try to guess what it’s for. Though you won’t.”

D’Artagnan had taken the poet’s hesitation and urge to hide the bit of iron as proof of its importance. His attention thus focused, he adopted a casual circumspection that gave him the advantage. And despite what Monsieur Jupenet had said, he’d recognized the function of the metal rectangle at first glance: it was a movable-type printing character.

“Can’t you guess what it is?” urged the poet.

“No!” said d’Artagnan. “Ma foi, no!”

“Well, Monsieur!” said Master Jupenet. “This little piece of metal is a printing character.”

“Never!”

“An upper-case letter.”

“Is it really?” said Monsieur Agnan, eyes wide and naïve.

“Yes, Monsieur, a capital J, the first letter of my name.”

“That’s a printing letter, right there?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Well! Can I ask something?”

“What’s that?”

“No, never mind! It would sound too stupid.”

“No, not at all!” said Master Jupenet, patronizing.

“Well, all right, then. If this is just a letter, how do you make a word?”

“A word?”

“A whole word in printing, yes.”

“That’s very simple.”

“Show me!”

“It interests you?”

“Very much!”

“Well, then! I’ll explain it to you.
Listen!”

“I’m listening.”

“Pay attention.”

“I shall.”

“Watch closely.”

“I’m watching.”

D’Artagnan did, in fact, seem completely absorbed. Jupenet drew from his pocket seven or eight other, smaller pieces of cast iron.

“Oh ho!” said d’Artagnan.

“What?”

“You have a whole printing press in your pocket. Plague take me, it’s fascinating!”

“Isn’t it, though?”

“Mon Dieu, the things you learn when you’re traveling!”

“Your health, Monsieur,” said

Jupenet, delighted.

“And yours, mordieux! But not with any more of this cider—it’s an abominable drink unworthy of a man who drinks à la Hippocrene. That is what you poets call your fountain, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Monsieur, in fact that’s what we call the poetic fountain. It comes from two Greek words, hippos, which means horse, and....”

“Monsieur,” interrupted d’Artagnan, “I’m going to pour you a drink that comes from a single French word, and none the worse for that: ‘grape.’ This cider nauseates and bloats me at once. Let me ask our host if he might not have a bottle of Beaugency or the vintage of Céran in the back of his cellar.”

They called for the host, and he immediately appeared. “Monsieur,” said the poet to d’Artagnan, “you should know, we might not have time to drink a bottle of wine unless we drain it quickly, for my boat has to sail with the tide.”

“What boat?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Why, the boat I’m taking to Belle-Île.”

“Ah! To Belle-Île!” said the musketeer. “How fine!”

“Bah! You’ll have plenty of time, Monsieur,” replied the innkeeper, uncorking the bottle. “The tide doesn’t turn for an hour.”

“But who will warn me when it’s time?” asked the poet.

“Just watch your neighbor in the next room,” replied the host.

“But I scarcely know him.”

“When he prepares to depart, it’s time to go.”

“He’s going to Belle-Île, too?”

“Yes.”

“That gentleman with a lackey?” asked d’Artagnan.

“The gentleman with a lackey.”

“Some seigneur, doubtless?”

“I have no idea.”

“Really? No idea?”

“Yes. All I know is he ordered the same wine you did.”

“Peste! That’s quite an honor for us,” said d’Artagnan, pouring a drink for his companion as the host departed.

“So,” said the poet, returning to his earlier idea, “you’ve never seen a printing press?”

“Never.”

“Here, I’ll pick out some letters and with the J, we’ll compose a word. O, R, my faith, here’s a U, L, A, and N.” And he assembled the letters with a speedy familiarity that didn’t escape the eye of d’Artagnan. “There, you see? Journal.”

“Ah!” said d’Artagnan. “I see the letters put together, but how do they stay together?” And he refilled the poet’s wine glass.

Monsieur Jupenet smiled like a man who had an answer for everything. He drew from his pocket a small metal rectangle, adjusted its length, and dropped the letters into its slot.

“And what do you call this little iron widget?” asked d’Artagnan. “I’m sure it has a name.”

“It’s called a composing stick,” said Jupenet. “We stack and align them to form the rows of type.”

“You see, it’s just as I said—you have a printing press in your pocket,” said d’Artagnan, laughing with such silly glee that the poet was completely taken in.

“No,” he replied, “I’m just too lazy to write, so when I have an idea for a verse I compose it right away for printing. It’s a bonus of the job.”

God’s death! thought d’Artagnan. I must make sure of this. And, making the usual excuse, which didn’t embarrass the musketeer in the least, he got up from the table, left the

room, went down the staircase, and ran to the shed where he found the poet's little cart. There he poked under the canvas with the point of his dagger and opened one of the packages, which he found full of cast-iron type like that in the poet's pocket. "Just so!" d'Artagnan said. "I don't know yet if Monsieur Fouquet plans to fortify Belle-Île, but here's all the ammunition he could need to wage a war of words." Then, pleased with his discovery, he returned to the table.

D'Artagnan had learned everything he needed to know. Nonetheless, he stayed with his supper companion until they heard in the next room the sound of a man gathering his things. The printer had previously given orders for his horse to be harnessed, and immediately leapt to his feet. His cart was waiting at the door. The second traveler and his lackey were climbing into the saddle. D'Artagnan followed Jupenet to the port and watched him put his horse and cart onto the ferry.

As for the well-dressed rider, he did the same with his horses and servant. But no matter who he asked about the traveler's name, he could learn nothing. However, he took careful notice of his face so it would remain engraved in his memory. D'Artagnan would have liked to have embarked with these two passengers, but a higher goal than curiosity, that of success, kept him on the shore and returned him to the inn.

He returned to his room with a sigh and went immediately to bed, the better to awake early the next day with fresh ideas and the good counsel of the night.

XVIII

*D'*Artagnan Continues *His* Investigations

A personally saddled Ferret, who'd been dining sumptuously all night on the feed left by his two companions. ^{t. daybreak} At daybreak, d'Artagnan the musketeer had learned what little he could from the innkeeper, who was stubborn, defiant, and devoted body

and soul to Monsieur Fouquet. Therefore, in order not to provoke the man's suspicion, he'd given him the story about looking for a salt-farm to invest in. After saying that, to embark for Belle-Île from La Roche-Bernard would excite skeptical commentary that might even be carried to the island. It was also notable that the identity of the gentleman traveler with the lackey remained a secret to d'Artagnan despite all the questions addressed to the innkeeper, who pretended complete ignorance.

The musketeer had to settle for directions to the salt marshes and took the road that led through them, leaving the shore on his right to pass into a vast and desolate plain that resembled nothing so much as a sea of mud crossed by narrow, salt-encrusted causeways. Ferret trod them carefully on his nervous little hooves, never more than a foot away from the salty muck. D'Artagnan, who knew that trying to manage the horse too closely would just result in a cold mud bath, let him choose his own route, contenting himself with looking

ahead at the three sharp points, like spearheads, visible on the horizon of this broad, treeless plain. These were the steeples of Piriac, the town of Batz, and Le Croisic, nearly identical, but the only objects to attract an observer's attention. If the traveler turned to orient himself by looking behind, he saw on the opposite horizon three other steeples, of Guérande, Le Pouliguen, and Saint-Joachim, which, added to the circumference, delineated a giant game of skittles in which Ferret and his rider were the wandering ball.

Piriac was the first small port on the right. D'Artagnan turned toward it, reminding himself of the names of the principal local salt-farmers, in case he needed to mention them. When he rode up to Piriac's little harbor, five big barges loaded with stones were just putting out from it. It seemed strange to d'Artagnan that stone was being shipped from a region where there was none. It took all the affability of Monsieur Agnan to learn from the closemouthed folk of the port the reason for this. Finally,

an old fisherman told Monsieur Agnan that the stones didn't come from Piriac, nor from the marshes either, of course. "Then where do they come from?" asked the musketeer.

"Monsieur, they come from Nantes and Paimbœuf."

"Where are they going?"

"To Belle-Île, Monsieur."

"Ah!" said d'Artagnan in the same tone he'd used to persuade the printer that the metal type interested him. "Are they building, then, on Belle-Île?"

"Mais oui-da! Every year Monsieur Fouquet makes repairs to his castle."

"Is it ruined, then?"

"It's very old."

"Oh! I see."

In fact, thought d'Artagnan, nothing could be more natural. Every owner has the right to repair his property. If I was just improving the

façade of Our Lady's Portrait, that wouldn't mean I was fortifying the place! Really, I think His Majesty has received false reports about this.

"You must admit," he continued aloud, addressing the fisherman, for his mission compelled him to be contrary, "you must admit, my good Monsieur, that these stones are taking an unusual route."

"How so?" said the fisherman.

"They come from Nantes or Paimbœuf at the mouth of the Loire, didn't you say?"

"Down from there."

"That doesn't sound very convenient to me. Why not go straight from Saint-Nazaire to Belle-Île?"

"Why? Because those flat-bottomed barges don't take the sea waves well," replied the fisherman.

"Why is that a reason?"

"Pardon me, Monsieur, but one can see you're no sailor," said the

fisherman, not without a touch of disdain.

“Then explain it to me if you would, my good man. Why go from Paimbœuf to Piriac, and then from Piriac to Belle-Île, when one could go from La Roche-Bernard to Nantes and from Nantes to Piriac?”

“By water, the first route is shorter,” replied the fisherman imperturbably.

“But doesn’t that just add a dogleg?”

The fisherman shook his head.

“The shortest route from one point to another is a straight line,” d’Artagnan continued stubbornly.

“You forget the currents, Monsieur.”

“Even given currents.”

“And the wind.”

“That too?”

“But yes. The current of the Loire

carries the boats nearly to Croisic. If they need to refit a bit or rest the crew, they come a little further along the coast to Piriac; from Piriac they pick up a reverse current that carries them to Île Dumet, two and a half leagues out.”

“All right.”

“From there, the current of the Vilaine takes them to the next island, Hoëdic.”

“I see that.”

“And then, Monsieur, from that island to Belle-Île is a straight shot. The sea, though choppy to left and to right, is as calm as a mirror between those two islands, and the barges glide across like ducks paddling on the Loire!”

“Maybe,” said the stubborn Monsieur Agnan, “but it’s still a long way around.”

“But that’s how Monsieur Fouquet wants it,” replied the fisherman conclusively, removing his woolen

cap as he pronounced the honored name.

A glance from d'Artagnan, with a look as sharp and piercing as a sword blade, discerned nothing in the old man's heart but naïve devotion, while his expression showed placid satisfaction. When he said, "That's how Monsieur Fouquet wants it," it was as if he'd said, "God wills it to be so."

D'Artagnan had gone as far as he could in this direction; besides, the barges having gone, the only boat left in Piriac was the old man's, and it looked like it needed a lot of work before it could venture out to sea. So d'Artagnan patted Ferret, who gave a new proof of his charming character by heading right back into the salt marshes, following his nose across the plain as he sniffed the constant dry breeze that bent the gorse and stunted heather of that country. They arrived at Croisic around five o'clock.

If d'Artagnan had been a poet, those broad strands, a league wide in

places and covered by the sea at high tide, would have been an inspiring sight. At the ebb they were grayish, desolate, strewn with seaweed and algae over scattered white stones, like bones in a vast cemetery. But the soldier, now a politician and man of ambition, had no need to consider it, or look to the heavens for hope or a warning. A red sky meant for the locals wind and storm, while white and fluffy clouds on the azure horizon said the sea will be likewise soft and serene. D'Artagnan just looked at the blue sky and sniffed at the salt breeze and said to himself, "I'll sail on the first tide, even if it's in nothing bigger than a nutshell."

At Croisic, as at Piriac, he noticed enormous heaps of stone lined up on the beach. These tumbled walls, demolished further at each tide by transports bound for Belle-Île, were in the eyes of the musketeer further proof of what he'd suspected at Piriac. Was it an old wall Monsieur Fouquet was repairing? Or was he building fortifications? To find out, he had to see for himself. D'Artagnan put

Ferret in the local stable, supped, went to bed, and the next morning at daybreak he was strolling along the port, or rather across the shingle.

The opening to Croisic harbor was fifty feet wide and overseen by a lookout tower that resembled an enormous sugarloaf on a plate. The strand was the plate and mounds of stones piled into a cone formed the loaf, mounted by a spiral path that served as both way to the top and lookout platform. That's how it is today, and that's how it was one hundred-eighty years ago, only the loaf was smaller, and the path probably didn't have a trellised railing now wound with pretty plantings.

On the shingle, three or four fishermen were discussing sardines and shrimp. Monsieur Agnan approached the fishermen with a cheerful look and a smile on his lips. "Are we fishing today?" he said.

"Yes, Monsieur," said one of them. "We're just waiting on the tide."

"Where do you go to fish, my

friends?”

“Along the coast, Monsieur.”

“What are the best fishing sites?”

“Ah, that depends! Around the islands, for example.”

“Is it far to these islands?”

“Not too far; four leagues.”

“Four leagues! But that’s a voyage!”

The fishermen laughed in Monsieur Agnan’s face. “But listen,” he said with naïve simplicity, “at four leagues you lose sight of the coast, don’t you?”

“Well, not always.”

“I still say it’s far, much too far. Otherwise I’d have asked you to let me come aboard and show me something I’ve never seen.”

“What’s that?”

“A live deep-sea fish.”

“Monsieur is from the provinces?”
said one of the fishermen.

“Yes, I’m from Paris.”

The Breton shrugged his shoulders, then asked “Have you seen Monsieur Fouquet in Paris?”

“Often,” Agnan replied.

“Often?” said the fishermen, moving closer to the Parisian. “Do you know him?”

“A little; he’s a close friend of my master.”

“Ah!” said the fishermen.

“And,” added d’Artagnan, “I’ve seen all his châteaux, at Saint-Mandé, at Vaux, and his hôtel in Paris.”

“Is it beautiful?”

“Superb.”

“But not as beautiful as Belle-Île,”
said one fisherman.

“Ha!” replied Monsieur Agnan with a disdainful chuckle that irritated his

audience.

“It’s obvious you’ve never seen Belle-Île,” said the most vocal of the fishermen. “Don’t you know that it’s six leagues long and has trees on it bigger than on the Nantes promenade?”

“Trees! Out at sea!” laughed d’Artagnan. “Oh, I’d like to see that!”

“Easily done. We’re going fishing off the island of Hoëdic; come with us. From there you can see the paradise of Belle-Île, with its trees towering against the sky. You’ll see the white walls of the castle that cut like a line across the horizon.”

“Oh!” said d’Artagnan. “That does sound beautiful. But Monsieur Fouquet’s château at Vaux has a hundred turrets, did you know that?”

The Breton raised his head in tentative admiration but wasn’t convinced. “A hundred turrets!” he said. “That’s good—but Belle-Île is better. Would you like to see Belle-Île?”

“Is such a thing possible?” asked Monsieur Agnan.

“Yes, with the governor’s permission.”

“But I don’t know the governor.”

“Since you know Monsieur Fouquet, you’ll just give him your name.”

“Oh, my friends! I’m not a gentleman!”

“Anyone can enter Belle-Île,” declared the fisherman in his pure Breton dialect, “provided he means no harm to Belle-Île or its lord.”

The musketeer felt a slight shiver go through him. True enough, he thought. Then he said aloud, “If I could be sure I wouldn’t be seasick....”

“What, on this?” said the fisherman, proudly showing off his pretty little round-bottomed boat.

“Let’s go! I’m convinced,” cried Monsieur Agnan. “I want to see Belle-

Île even if they won't let me in."

"We can get in."

"You can? How?"

"Dame! We sell our fish to the corsairs."

"What, you say there are corsairs?"

"I do—Monsieur Fouquet is having two fast privateers built to chase the Dutch and the English, and we sell our fish to the crews of those vessels."

Well, well, thought d'Artagnan. Better and better! A printing press, fortifications, and now corsairs. It seems Monsieur Fouquet is no mean opponent after all, and I was wrong. It'll be worth the effort to see it up close.

"We sail at five-thirty," the fisherman added gravely.

"I am all yours and will stay with you till then."

In fact, d'Artagnan went with them

as the fishermen rolled the boat over logs down to the edge of the advancing tide. As the sea rose, he was drenched to his neck, feigning some fear, to the amusement of the little children of the port who watched him with their big, bright eyes. He laid down on a folded sail to dry off and watch the preparations, and after two hours the boat took to the sea.

The fishermen, busy with their lines and nets as they sailed, didn't notice that their passenger didn't blanch, groan, nor suffer, and that despite the horrible pitching and brutal rolling of the boat, which no one bothered to mitigate, the novice sailor maintained his presence of mind and even appetite. They were fishing, and the fishing was pretty good. The shrimp took their baited lines, as did, with sudden jolts, the sole and plaice. Two nets had been fouled by enormous congers and cod, and three sea-eels writhed and twisted in the hold in their dying agonies. D'Artagnan had brought them luck, or so they told him. The

soldier found the work so pleasant that he put his own hand to the job, that is to say the lines, and every time a jolt struck the line, he uttered joyful cries and oaths that would have astounded his musketeers. In conquering this new prey, he strained all the muscles of his arms and used every bit of his strength and skill.

This pleasant occupation had made him forget his diplomatic mission. He was wrestling with a frightful conger, clinging to the side with one hand while he fought his antagonist with the other, avoiding its gaping jaw, when the boss said to him, "Take care they don't see you from Belle-Île!" These words had the same effect on d'Artagnan as the first whistling musket-ball of a battle; he dropped the line and the conger, and both returned to the sea.

D'Artagnan looked up to see, a half-league off, the bluish, rocky silhouette of Belle-Île, dominated by the white line of its castle walls. Beyond was the rising land, with forests, green plains, and cattle in the

pastures. That's what first attracted the musketeer's attention; the sun, at a low angle, glanced golden rays from the sea and limned the island in a glimmering aura. This made it hard to discern details, as every tree or wall threw a solid streak of shadow across the adjacent terrain.

"Ho!" said d'Artagnan at the sight of the shore's cliffs of dark rock. "There, it seems to me, are natural fortifications that no engineer need improve to forestall a landing. Where on earth could one set foot on ground that God has so completely defended?"

"This way," the master of the boat replied, throwing over the helm and porting the rudder with a jolt, turning the bow in the direction of a pretty little port, with a half-moon harbor newly encircled with battlements.

"What the devil do I see there?" said d'Artagnan.

"You see Locmaria," replied the fisherman.

“Up on the heights?”

“That’s Bangor.”

“And beyond?”

“Sauzon ... and Le Palais.”

“Mordioux! It’s a whole world. Ah! Look at all the soldiers.”

“There are seventeen hundred men on Belle-Île, Monsieur,” replied the fisherman with pride. “Don’t you know the garrison is twenty-two companies of infantry?”

“Mordioux,” d’Artagnan repeated, stamping his foot. His Majesty might be right.

XIX

In Which
the Reader
will
Doubtless Be
as
Astonished
as

d'Artagnan to Meet an Old Acquaintance

I with the smallest boat, there's always a certain amount of trouble and confusion on a landing from the sea, even freedom to pay close attention to one's new surroundings. The swinging gangplank, the shouting sailors, the sound of the waves on the shingle, the eager shouts of those waiting ashore, all contribute to one result: hesitation. So, it was only after disembarking and spending a few minutes on shore that d'Artagnan noticed in the port, and even more toward the island's interior,

a moving mass of laborers. In front of him, d'Artagnan recognized the five barges of rubble that he'd seen departing the port of Piriac. The stones were being transferred to shore by a human chain of twenty-five or thirty peasants. The largest boulders were being loaded onto carts and borne off in the same direction as the rubble, toward works the full extent of which d'Artagnan couldn't yet determine.

The whole port seethed with *activity like that which Telemachus saw when he landed at Salentum.* 48 D'Artagnan was aching to investigate further, but he didn't dare to arouse distrust or suspicion by showing too much curiosity. So, he went further inland only little by little, barely venturing beyond the line of fishermen on the beach, watching everything, saying nothing, and replying to all greetings or inquiries with a silly question or polite evasion. Meanwhile, as his companions plied their trade, selling and crying the virtues of their fish to the inhabitants of the town, d'Artagnan gradually

gained ground, until, reassured by how little attention was paid to him, he began to make a sustained and intelligent examination of the locals and their surroundings.

And the first thing d'Artagnan noticed was recent changes in the terrain whose purpose no soldier could mistake. At either end of the port, sited so their arcs of fire enfiladed the full sweep of the harbor, two shore batteries had been constructed and were nearly ready to receive their cannon. D'Artagnan could see the workmen completing the artillery platforms and finishing the half-circle rails upon which the pieces would rotate in their emplacements. Beside each outer battery, other workers were filling the rectangular wire baskets called gabions with rubble to build up the revetments before a second, inner battery. This one had embrasures for smaller guns, and a foreman directed the men who, with cables, bound the gabions into the gaps excavated for them in the turf around the embrasures.

Based on the activity visible at these terminal works, they looked to be nearly complete; they hadn't yet been furnished with guns, but their platforms were filled and graded, and their planks fully installed. The surface of the earthworks had been carefully packed and compounded, and assuming the artillery was already on the island, in only two or three days the port's defenses could be complete.

What astonished d'Artagnan, when he turned his gaze from the shore batteries to the fortifications of the city, was his recognition that Belle-Île's defenses were being built to a completely new system, an approach he'd heard about from the Comte de La Fère as a great advance, but which he'd never seen applied. These fortifications weren't built according to the Dutch method of de Marollois, nor the French method of Chevalier Antoine de Ville, nor even the system of Manesson Mallet, an able engineer who'd recently left Portugal to take service with France.

These works were remarkable in that, instead of rising from the ground like old-style ramparts designed to defend the town from escalades, these, on the contrary, sank into it, and what gave height to their walls was the depths of their moats. It didn't take d'Artagnan long to recognize the superiority of such a system, which provides only a glancing target for cannon fire. In addition, because the moats were below sea level, their ditches could be flooded by opening their sea gates.

Moreover, these works were almost completed, and a group of laborers, overseen by a man who appeared to be directing the job, was busy laying the final stones. A plank scaffold had been thrown over the ditch to connect the inside and outside and enable the passage of wheelbarrows. D'Artagnan asked, with naïve curiosity, whether he might be allowed to cross over this bridge and was told there was no order forbidding it. So, d'Artagnan crossed the planks and approached the group of workers. This group was

dominated by the man d'Artagnan had already noticed, who appeared to be the engineer-in-chief. A plan was laid on a large flat stone that served as a table, and a few steps beyond that a crane was at work. This engineer, so obviously important, was the first to draw d'Artagnan's attention, partly because he wore a doublet that was so splendid it seemed at odds with the work he was doing, which seemed to call for the outfit of a master mason rather than that of a noble lord. He was, moreover, a man of stature, tall, broad, and square-shouldered, and wearing a broad hat festooned with plumes. His gestures could not have been more majestic, and he seemed, from behind, to be chiding the workers for their laziness and weakness.

D'Artagnan drew nearer. As he did the man with the plumes stopped gesticulating and, with his hands on his knees, leaned forward to observe the efforts of six workers who were trying to lift a dressed stone above the height of a lumber roller so it

could be brought to where the crane could grasp it. The six men, surrounding the stone, combined all their efforts to raise it eight or ten inches above the ground, sweating and panting, while a seventh prepared to slip the roller under it as soon as there was enough room. But already the stone had twice slipped from their hands before they could lift it high enough for the roller to slide under it. It goes without saying that every time the stone got away from them, they jumped back to avoid having their feet crushed, and each time the great stone fell it sank deeper into the slippery soil, which made the workers' task that much more difficult.

A third effort was made, the six men bending over the stone, the man with the plumes crying the word, "Heave!", the exhortation always used in such affairs, but with no better success, which just discouraged the laborers even further.

The chief straightened up. "Ho!" he said. "What's this? Am I dealing with

men of straw? Corne de bœuf! Step aside, and I'll show you how it's done."

"Peste!" said d'Artagnan. "Does he think he can lift that rock himself? I'd like to see him try."

The workers, shamed by the engineer, stood back, eyes down and shaking their heads, all but the one manning the roller, who was preparing to do his job. The man with the plumes approached the stone, stooped, slipped his hands under its bottom side, flexed his Herculean muscles, and, without a jerk, but moving slowly like a machine, lifted the great stone a foot off the ground.

The worker with the roller took the opportunity to slide the lumber under the stone. "Voilà!" said the giant, not dropping the stone, merely resting it on its support.

"Mordioux!" cried d'Artagnan, "I know only one man capable of such a feat of strength."

"Eh?" said the colossus, turning

around.

“Porthos!”* whispered d’Artagnan in a stupor. “Porthos on Belle-Île!”

For his part, the man with the plumes took a close look at the pretended steward and recognized him, despite his disguise. “D’Artagnan!” he thundered.

But then a blush colored his face. “Hush!” he said to d’Artagnan.

And, “Hush!” said the musketeer.

In fact, if Porthos had just been discovered by d’Artagnan, d’Artagnan had likewise been discovered by Porthos, and the first thought of both men had been to maintain their incognito.

But their second thought was to rush into each other’s arms, for what they wanted to conceal from those around them was their names, not their friendship.

However, after the embrace came mutual reflection. Why the devil is Porthos on Belle-Île lifting giant

stones? thought d'Artagnan.

But though d'Artagnan kept his question in his thoughts, his friend Porthos, who was not so diplomatic, spoke his question aloud. "Why the devil have you come to Belle-Île," he asked d'Artagnan, "and what are you doing here?"

It was necessary to reply without hesitation. To hesitate in answering Porthos's question would have been a blunder for which d'Artagnan could never forgive himself. "By God, my friend," he said, "I'm on Belle-Île because you are!"

"No!" said Porthos, visibly stunned by this statement and trying to process it with that clarity of thinking with which we're familiar.

"Absolutely," continued d'Artagnan, who had no intention of giving his friend time to think it through. "I went looking for you at Pierrefonds."

"Really?"

"Yes."

“And you didn’t find me there?”

“No, but I found *Mousqueton*.” 49

“Is he all right?”

“Pardieu, yes!”

“But I don’t think *Mouston* 50
would tell you where I was.”

“Why wouldn’t he? Have I become
unworthy somehow of Mouston’s
confidence?”

“No, he just didn’t know where I
was.”

“Ha! Did you think that was reason
enough to stop me?”

“But then how did you find me?”

“How? My dear friend, a grand
seigneur like you always leaves traces
of his passage, and I wouldn’t be the
man I think I am if I couldn’t follow
my own friends’ tracks.”

This explanation, flattering though
it was, didn’t entirely satisfy Porthos.
“But I didn’t leave tracks because I
traveled in disguise,” he said.

“Oh, you came in disguise?” said d’Artagnan.

“Yes.”

“As what?”

“As a miller.”

“And you think a noble lord like you, Porthos, can imitate common manners well enough to fool people?”

“But yes! I swear to you, my friend, I played my part so well that everyone was deceived.”

“Maybe not as well as you think, since I was able to follow and discover you.”

“All right, how did you follow and discover me?”

“Hold on, I was about to tell you. Imagine that Mouston....”

“So! It was that clown Mouston,” said Porthos, arching his mighty eyebrows.

“Wait, wait, hear me out. It’s not Mouston’s fault, since he didn’t know

where you were.”

“That’s true. Which is why I don’t understand.”

“How impatient you are, Porthos!”

“When I don’t understand, I’m a terror.”

“You will understand, really. Aramis wrote to you at Pierrefonds, didn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“And he told you to arrive before the equinox, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Well! There you have it,” said d’Artagnan, hoping that explanation would be enough for Porthos.

Porthos appeared to be thinking very hard. “Ah!” he said. “I do understand. Since Aramis said I was to arrive before the equinox, you knew that meant I should join him. You then asked yourself where Aramis was, saying, ‘When I find

Aramis, I find Porthos.' You learned that Aramis was in Brittany, so you said, 'Porthos is in Brittany.'"

"Exactly! Really, Porthos, you're practically a prophet. You'll understand, then, that when I arrived at La Roche-Bernard, I heard about the beautiful fortification work under way on Belle-Île. That piqued my curiosity. I took passage on a fishing boat, without having any idea you were here. I landed, and saw a fellow lifting a stone that Ajax couldn't have budged. I cried, 'Only the Baron de Bracieux is capable of such a feat of strength!' You heard me, turned, recognized me, we embraced, and faith! If you will, dear friend, we'll embrace again."

"Well, that explains everything," said Porthos. And he embraced d'Artagnan with such sincerity that the musketeer could scarcely breathe for five minutes.

"Come, now, you're stronger than ever," said d'Artagnan, "and fortunately for you, in your arms!"

Porthos saluted d'Artagnan with a gracious smile. But during the five minutes while he recovered his breath, the musketeer thought about the difficult role he had to play. He had to be the one who always asked and never answered. And by the time his breathing had recovered, his plan of campaign was laid.

XX

In Which
d'Artagnan's
Ideas,
Though
Cloudy at
First, Begin
to Clear Up

D immediately took the offensive. “Now that I’ve told you everything, dear friend, or rather ‘Artagnan’ since you’ve guessed everything, tell me what you’re doing here, getting covered in dust and mud?”

Porthos wiped his brow, and looking around him with pride, said, “But it seems to me you can see exactly what I’m doing here!”

“Right, right—you’re lifting stones.”

“Oh, only to show these lazy folk what a real man is like!” Porthos said with contempt. “But, you understand....”

“Yes, it’s not your station to lift stones, though there are many whose station it is who can’t lift them like you. That’s what made me ask you just now, ‘What are you doing here, Baron?’”

“I’m studying topography,

Chevalier.”

“What? You’re studying topography?”

“Yes. But you—why are you dressed as a bourgeois?”

D’Artagnan realized he’d made a mistake by showing his astonishment, which had given Porthos a chance to riposte with a question. Fortunately, it was a question d’Artagnan expected. “Well, you know,” he said, “I am a bourgeois these days, so my outfit isn’t surprising, as it reflects my condition.”

“Come, now, you’re a musketeer!”

“I was, mon bon ami, but I’ve given my resignation.”

“Bah!”

“I have, by God!”

“You’ve quit the service?”

“Resigned.”

“You’ve left the king?”

“Completely.”

Porthos raised his arms to heaven as if this news was beyond belief. “Oh, I must confess,” he said, “that bewilders me.”

“And yet, it’s so.”

“But how could such a thing happen?”

“The king displeased me. Mazarin had disgusted me for a long while, as you know, and I finally just threw my helmet over the wall.”

“But Mazarin is dead.”

“Oh, I know, but by the time of his death my resignation had already been handed in and accepted for two months. It was then that, being free at last, I went to Pierrefonds to see my dear Porthos. I had heard of the brilliant way you organized your leisure time, and I wanted to try your methods for a week or two.”

“My friend, you know that my house isn’t open to you for just a week or two, but for a year, for ten

years, for life.”

“Thank you, Porthos.”

“It’s nothing! Do you need any money?” said Porthos, jingling a purse filled with fifty louis. “You know, if you do....”

“No, I don’t need anything; I invested my savings with Planchet, who pays me the interest.”

“Your savings?”

“Of course,” said d’Artagnan. “Why do you think I wouldn’t have savings like other people, Porthos?”

“Me? I think no such thing. On the contrary, I always suspected ... that is, Aramis always suspected you had savings. As for me, I know nothing of financial affairs, I just assumed a musketeer’s savings wouldn’t be that much.”

“I’m not worth much compared to a genuine millionaire like you, Porthos, but you be the judge. For starters, I had twenty-five thousand livres.”

“A nice amount,” said Porthos affably.

“And then,” continued d’Artagnan, “as of the 25th of last month, I added another two hundred thousand livres.”

Porthos opened his eyes wide enough to ask, without words, Where the devil did you steal a sum like that, old friend? He blinked and said, “Two hundred thousand livres!”

“Yes, and with the twenty-five thousand I had, and the twenty thousand I have on me, that makes me worth two hundred and forty-five thousand livres.”

“But, look here! Where did this fortune come from?”

“Ah, well! I’ll explain that later, dear friend—it’s just that you have so much to tell me about yourself, I wanted to get my story out of the way first.”

“Bravo!” said Porthos. “Now we’re all rich. But what was it I had to tell

you?”

“You had to tell me how Aramis was appointed....”

“Oh, right! Bishop of Vannes.”

“That’s it,” said d’Artagnan, “Bishop of Vannes. Dear Aramis! He always did know how to get ahead.”

“Yes, yes! And he doesn’t mean to stop there.”

“Oh? You think he won’t be satisfied with the purple robe of a bishop and would prefer the red hat of a cardinal?”

“Hush! But yes, it’s been promised.”

“Bah! By the king?”

“By someone more powerful than the king.”

“The devil you say, Porthos! Your story is incredible, my friend.”

“Why incredible? Isn’t there always someone in France more powerful than the king?”

“Oh, true enough. In the time of King Louis XIII, it was the Duc de Richelieu, and during the Regency it was Cardinal Mazarin. And in the reign of Louis XIV, it’s Mons....”

“Go on!”

“It’s Monsieur Fouquet.”

“Bull’s-eye! You hit it first shot.”

“So, it’s Monsieur Fouquet who’s promised the red hat to Aramis?”

Porthos assumed an air of reserve. “Now, old friend,” he said, “God forbid I should meddle in others’ affairs, especially when it comes to secrets they’d prefer to keep. When you see Aramis, he’ll tell you what he thinks he should tell you.”

“You’re right, Porthos, and you’re as silent as a stone. Let’s return to you.”

“Sure,” said Porthos.

“You told me you’re here to study topography?”

“Exactly.”

“Well, by God, what a fine study you’ve made of it!”

“How so?”

“These new fortifications are admirable.”

“Is that your honest opinion?”

“No doubt about it. Really, to anything but a prolonged siege, Belle-Île looks impregnable.”

Porthos rubbed his hands with satisfaction. “That’s my opinion, too,” he said.

“But who the devil has fortified this backwater so well?”

Porthos swelled with pride. “You mean I didn’t tell you?”

“No.”

“You don’t suspect who it was?”

“No; all I can say is it’s clearly a man who’s studied every system of fortification and arrived at the best.”

“Oh, hush!” said Porthos. “You make me blush, my dear d’Artagnan.”

“Wait!” replied the musketeer. “You mean, all the time ... it was you! Oh!”

“By God’s good grace, my friend.”

“You’re the one who imagined, planned, and constructed these bastions, these redoubts, those curtain walls and demi-lunes, and that covered approach?”

“Ah, please....”

“You, who built that outwork with its retiring and salient angles?”

“My friend....”

“You, who gave those gun embrasures that oblique slope that protects both the cannon and those who serve them?”

“Well, good Lord, yes.”

“Ah, Porthos, we must bow to you in admiration! How carefully you’ve always hidden this special genius! I

hope, my friend, that you'll show me all the details of your works."

"Nothing could be simpler. Here are the plans."

"Let me see."

Porthos led d'Artagnan to the flat rock that served as a table and upon which the plan was laid out. Across the base of the plan was written, in Porthos's great square hand, these instructions: Instead of using the Square or Rectangle, as was Previously Done, you will Plot All Works using Regular Hexagons. This Polygon has the Advantage of offering More Angles than the Quadrilateral. Each Side of your Hexagon, the Length of which will be Decided by the Dimensions of the Site, will be Divided into Two Parts, and from the Center you will Draw a Perpendicular to the Center of the Polygon, which will be Equal in Length to One-Sixth of the Side. From the Ends on Each Side of the Polygon you will Draw Two Diagonals that Cut the Perpendicular. These Two Lines

will form the Major Lines of Defense.

“The devil!” said d’Artagnan when he reached the end of these instructions. “But is this the basis of the complete system, Porthos?”

“Every bit,” said Porthos. “Would you like to see more?”

“No, I’ve read enough. But since you’re the one, my dear Porthos, who directs the work, why do you need to have the system written out?”

“Because of death, my friend.”

“Death? What do you mean?”

“Eh! We are, after all, only mortals.”

“That’s true,” said d’Artagnan. “You have an answer for everything, my friend.” And he set the plan back on the stone. But before he did so, d’Artagnan looked closely at the writing and had been able to distinguish, under the enormous lettering of Porthos, a smaller and more elegant handwriting that reminded him of *certain letters to*

Marie Michon 51 he'd seen in his youth. However, a gum eraser had almost entirely effaced this writing, which would have escaped the notice of any eye less keen than that of our musketeer. "Bravo, my friend!" d'Artagnan said.

"And now you know everything you want to know, don't you?" said Porthos, with a broad gesture at his surroundings.

"My God, yes—except, do me one favor, old friend."

"Speak; I am the master here."

"Tell me the name of that gentleman walking across over there."

"Where, over there?"

"Beyond the soldiers."

"Followed by a lackey?"

"That's the one."

"Accompanied by a sort of old crow dressed in black?"

“Exactly!”

“That’s Monsieur Gétard.”

“And what is Monsieur Gétard, mon ami?”

“He’s the architect for the house.”

“For what house?”

“Monsieur Fouquet’s house.”

“Oh ho!” said d’Artagnan. “Are you also considered part of Monsieur Fouquet’s household, Porthos?”

“Me? Why do you say that?” asked the topographer, blushing to the tips of his ears.

“Well, you say the house when speaking of Belle-Île the same way you might when speaking of the Château de Pierrefonds.”

Porthos pursed his lips. “Belle-Île belongs to Monsieur Fouquet, doesn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“As Pierrefonds belongs to me?”

“Certainly.”

“Did you go to Pierrefonds?”

“I told you, I was there not two months ago.”

“Did you see a gentleman who was in the habit of walking around carrying drafting tools?”

“No, though I might have.”

“Well! That gentleman is Monsieur Boulingrin.”

“And what is Monsieur Boulingrin?”

“You see? At my place, when someone sees a gentleman carrying a ruler and asks me, ‘What is Monsieur Boulingrin,’ I answer, ‘He’s the architect for the house.’ Well! Monsieur Gétard is Monsieur Fouquet’s Boulingrin. But he has nothing to do with the fortifications, that’s solely my concern, do you understand? Absolutely nothing.”

“Heavens, Porthos!” cried d’Artagnan, letting his arms fall limp

as if defeated. "Old friend, you're not only a Herculean topographer, you're also a first-class logician."

"Aren't I, though?" replied Porthos. "Wasn't that profoundly reasoned?" And he puffed up like the conger that d'Artagnan had let escape him that morning.

"And now," continued d'Artagnan, "is that shabby crow who accompanies Monsieur Gétard also of the house of Monsieur Fouquet?"

"Him?" said Porthos with contempt. "That's a Monsieur Jupenet or Juponet, some kind of poet."

"Who was brought here?"

"I believe so."

"I should think Monsieur Fouquet had enough poets back home, with Scudéry, Loret, Pellisson, and La Fontaine. Compared to them, I must say, Porthos, this poet doesn't reflect well on you."

"The saving grace, my friend, is

that he isn't here as a poet."

"What is he, then?"

"Some kind of printer—but since you mention him, I think I should have a word with this shabby crow."

"Go ahead."

Porthos beckoned to Jupenet, but the man had recognized d'Artagnan and was unsure if he should approach until Porthos beckoned to him again. This second gesture was so imperative that he had to obey and came over.

"Here!" said Porthos. "You arrived just yesterday and already you're making a nuisance of yourself."

"How so, Monsieur le Baron?" asked Jupenet, trembling.

"Your press was thumping and groaning all night, Monsieur," said Porthos, "and it kept me from sleeping, corne de bœuf!"

"But, Monsieur..." objected Jupenet timidly.

“You have nothing to print yet, so you have no excuse to run your press. What were you printing all night?”

“A little light poetry, Monsieur, of my own composition.”

“Light! Not light enough to keep your press from moaning piteously. See that it doesn’t happen again, do you hear?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“All right, then, this once, I forgive you. Begone!”

The poet withdrew even more humbly than he’d come.

“Well! Now that that clown’s been told off, let’s have some lunch,” said Porthos.

“Yes,” said d’Artagnan, “let’s eat.”

“But I have to warn you, my friend,” said Porthos, “that we have only two hours for our meal.”

“We’ll just have to make the best of it. But why do we have only two hours?”

“Because the tide turns at one o’clock, and I leave on the tide for Vannes. But I’ll be back tomorrow, dear friend, so stay at my place, where your word will be law. I have a good cook, and a better wine cellar.”

“But no,” interrupted d’Artagnan, “I have a better idea.”

“What?”

“You’re going to Vannes, you say?”

“That’s right.”

“To see Aramis?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I came from Paris expressly to see Aramis....”

“That’s true.”

“So, I’ll go with you.”

“Yes! Of course!”

“I’d set out to see Aramis and then you, but man proposes and God disposes, so I’ll start with you and end with Aramis.”

“Fine!”

“Now, how long does it take you to get from here to Vannes?”

“Lord love us, six hours at the most: three hours to cross the sea between here and Sarzeau, and then three hours on the road from Sarzeau to Vannes.”

“Most convenient! And do you often go to Vannes, since you’re so close to the bishopric?”

“Yes, once a week. Wait a moment while I get my construction plan.” Porthos picked up his plan, folded it carefully, and stuffed it inside his doublet.

Good! thought d’Artagnan. I think I now know the true identity of the engineer who’s fortifying Belle-Île.

Two hours later, with the rising tide, Porthos and d’Artagnan sailed

for Sarzeau.

XXI

A

Procession at Vannes

TÎle to Sarzeau was a quick one, thanks to one of those small corsair vessels d'Artagnan had heard about on the way over, and which, built for speed and made for pursuit, were temporarily sheltered in Locmaria harbor, where one of them, one-quarter crewed, was assigned to packet service between Belle-Île and

the continent. The trip gave d'Artagnan an opportunity to convince himself once again that Porthos, though serving as an engineer and topographer, had no knowledge of State secrets. His perfect ignorance might have seemed to others like clever deceit, but d'Artagnan knew the ins and outs of his Porthos too well not to spot a secret if one was there, as a tidy and meticulous old man knows, without looking, where to find a book on the shelves of his library, or the linen in the drawer of his dresser. So, if he, the ingenious d'Artagnan, had turned Porthos inside out and hadn't found anything, there was nothing to find.

"It's likely," said d'Artagnan to himself, "that I'll learn more about Vannes in half an hour than Porthos has learned about Belle-Île in two months. But if I'm going to learn anything at all, I can't let Porthos use the only stratagem I've left to him—he mustn't warn Aramis of my arrival."

Therefore, all the musketeer's

attention was turned to keeping an eye on Porthos. It must be said that Porthos didn't deserve such suspicion; the giant didn't have a deceitful thought in his head. D'Artagnan's sudden appearance might have given him a moment of suspicion, but d'Artagnan had quickly regained the position he'd always occupied in that good and courageous heart, and no cloud of doubt obscured Porthos's gaze when he turned it from time to time with tenderness on his friend.

Upon landing, Porthos asked if his horses were ready for him. In fact, he soon spotted them waiting with his equerry at the corner of the road that curves in a bypass around Sarzeau, and which, after passing the little town, leads to Vannes. These horses were two in number, one for Porthos and one for his equerry—for Porthos needed an equerry now that a cart was Mousqueton's only means of transportation. D'Artagnan expected Porthos to propose having his equerry ride ahead to fetch another mount, and planned to object to that

idea, but d'Artagnan's expectations were belied: Porthos simply ordered his equerry to dismount and wait for him at Sarzeau while d'Artagnan rode the equerry's horse, and that's how it was arranged.

"Why, you've become a man of foresight, my dear Porthos," said d'Artagnan to his friend when he found himself riding the equerry's horse.

"I have, but this is all thanks to Aramis; I don't have my mounts and tack here, so Aramis has put his stables at my disposal."

"And good mounts they are, too, for bishop's horses!" said d'Artagnan. "Though I'm sure Aramis is very particular, for a bishop."

"He's a saintly man," Porthos replied, looking up at the heavens, though with a smile.

"Then he's considerably changed," said d'Artagnan, "for we both know how worldly he used to be."

“He’s been touched by efficacious grace!” said Porthos.

“Excellent!” said d’Artagnan. “In that case I’m twice as eager to see him.” And he spurred his horse to greater speed.

“A plague on that!” said Porthos. “If we ride that fast, it’ll take us only one hour instead of two.”

“How far did you say it was, Porthos?”

“Four and a half leagues.”

“That’s not so far.”

“We could have taken a boat up the canal, but the devil with rowers and tow-horses! The former are like tortoises, and the latter are slugs. If one can get a good horse between his knees, that always beats such things as rowers.”

“Quite right, especially for you, Porthos, who always look so magnificent on horseback.”

“Though I’ve grown a little heavy,

my friend; I weighed myself the other day.”

“And how heavy are you?”

“Three hundredweight!” said Porthos with pride.

“Bravo!”

“So, you understand, I have to choose horses who are wide in the hindquarters, or in two hours I break them.”

“Yes, horses for a giant, right, Porthos?”

“Good of you to say so, my friend,” replied the engineer with affectionate majesty.

“In fact, mon ami, it looks to me like your horse is sweating already,” said d’Artagnan.

“Dame, it’s hot, though. Ah, but look! There’s Vannes, can you see it?”

“Yes, indeed. It’s a beautiful city, isn’t it?”

“Charming, at least according to

Aramis. I find it too dark, but it seems that artists are partial to black. I wish they weren't."

"Why's that, Porthos?"

"Because my château at Pierrefonds was gray with age, so I just had it whitewashed."

"I see," said d'Artagnan. "White is more cheerful."

"More cheerful, but Aramis says it's less dignified. Fortunately, there are black plaster experts here, and I'll just have to hire some to redo Pierrefonds in black. If gray was worthy, then black will be superb."

"I can't fault your logic," said d'Artagnan.

"Have you ever been to Vannes, d'Artagnan?"

"Never."

"So, you don't know this city?"

"Not at all."

"Then look there," said Porthos,

lifting himself in his stirrups, a movement that caused his horse to splay his forelegs. “Do you see, in the sun there, that tower?”

“I see it.”

“That’s the cathedral.”

“What’s it called?”

“Saint-Pierre. Now, there, in the lower town on the left, do you see another steeple?”

“Perfectly.”

“That’s Saint-Paterne, the parish preferred by Aramis.”

“Is it?”

“Indeed! You see, Saint Paterne is said to have been the first Bishop of Vannes, though Aramis says he wasn’t. But with the scholarly way he puts things, that might just be a paro... a pari....”

“A paradox,” said d’Artagnan.

“Exactly. Thanks, it’s so hot, my tongue was sticking in my mouth.”

“Mon ami,” said d’Artagnan, “please continue your guided tour. What’s that tall, white building dotted with windows?”

“Ah! That’s the College of Jesuits. You still have a sharp eye, by God! Do you see, near the college, that large house with turrets and a belfry, built in the finest Gothic style, as that brute Monsieur Gétard says?”

“Yes, I see it. Well?”

“Well! That’s where Aramis lives.”

“What, he doesn’t live in the bishop’s palace?”

“No, the bishop’s palace is in ruins. Besides, the bishopric is in the old town, and Aramis prefers the lower town. That’s why, like I said, he prefers Saint-Paterne, as that church is in the lower town, along with a mall, a tennis court, and a house of the Dominicans. Do you see where that handsome steeple points to heaven?”

“Very well.”

“The lower town, you see, is practically a separate city, with its own walls, towers, and moat; that’s where the town docks are, and the boats come right up to the wharf. If our little corsair didn’t have an eight-foot draft, we could have sailed right up under Aramis’s window.”

“Ah, Porthos, my friend,” d’Artagnan enthused, “you’re a well of knowledge and a fount of ideas both ingenious and profound. Porthos, I’m beyond surprised, and deeply impressed.”

“Well, here we are, and this is it,” said Porthos, diverting the conversation with his usual modesty.

And about time, too, thought d’Artagnan, for Aramis’s mount is melting under him like a horse of ice.

They had just entered the lower town and had gone hardly a hundred paces before they were surprised to find the streets strewn with flowers and garlands. From the aged walls of Vannes were hanging the oldest and most curious tapestries in France.

The wrought iron balconies were draped with white bunting accented by bouquets. However, the streets were deserted, as if the entire population was gathered elsewhere. The shutters on the houses were all closed, but they were cooled by the hanging tapestries and bunting, which cast dark, heavy shadows on the walls.

Suddenly, from around a street corner, music and song struck the ears of the newcomers. A crowd in their Sunday best appeared in a cloud of blue incense that rose from swinging censers, while a blizzard of rose petals fluttered down from the balconies. It was a procession. Waving above the crowds' heads were crosses and banners inscribed with the sacred signs of religion. Dancing beneath these crosses and banners, as if under their protection, was a troupe of young girls dressed in white and crowned with blue cornflowers. Down each side of the street, flanking the cortège, marched a file of soldiers from the garrison, with flowers in their musket barrels and

tied to the tips of their pikes.

While d'Artagnan and Porthos watched with expressions of respect that masked their impatience to press onward, a magnificent canopy approached, preceded by a hundred Jesuits and a hundred Dominicans, and escorted by two archdeacons, an almoner, a penitent brother, and twelve canons. A cantor with a thundering voice, surely one of France's leading singers and as carefully chosen as a drum major of the Imperial Guard, accompanied by four other singers, made the sacred songs resound from the walls and vibrate the very windows of the houses.

Under the canopy appeared a pale and noble face, with dark eyes, black hair salted with silver, and a mouth thin-lipped and judicious above a prominent and angular chin. This graceful and majestic head was topped by a bishop's miter that gave it a character, not just of sovereignty, but of asceticism and holy meditation.

“Aramis!” cried the musketeer involuntarily as this haughty figure passed before him.

The prelate started and shuddered, like the risen dead hearing the voice of the Savior. He raised his large, dark, long-lashed eyes and turned them unerringly on the source of the exclamation. At a glance he saw Porthos with d’Artagnan beside him.

For his part, d’Artagnan, so keen-eyed, had instantly seen and understood all. The full portrait of the prelate was stamped in his memory, never to leave it. One thing especially struck d’Artagnan: upon seeing him, Aramis had flushed, and in a single moment had suppressed the burning gaze of the master and replaced it with the affectionate look of a friend.

For he knew his friend d’Artagnan’s discernment and intelligence, and feared he might guess the reason for his surprise and sudden coloring. It was the same old Aramis, always with a secret to conceal. So, the penetrating gaze of the inquisitor

must be deflected at all costs, as a general must, at any price, silence an artillery battery pounding his vanguard. Aramis extended his handsome white hand, upon which sparkled the amethyst of the episcopal ring, divided the air with the sign of the cross, and bestowed upon his two friends his blessing.

D'Artagnan, riveted, might not have reacted to this holy benediction, but Porthos had noticed his distraction and, with an amiable press on his friend's back, pushed him to his knees. D'Artagnan buckled and nearly fell flat.

Meanwhile, Aramis had passed by. D'Artagnan, as if strengthened like *Antaeus* 52 by the touch of the ground, turned on Porthos almost angrily. But he'd misunderstood his good Hercules, who had nothing in mind but religious propriety. Besides, Porthos, who always spoke his mind without deceit, said, "It was very kind of him to give us a personal blessing. He really is a good and holy man."

D'Artagnan, less convinced of this than Porthos, said nothing.

“Look, friend,” Porthos continued, “now that he’s seen us, instead of continuing the procession’s slow march, he’s picked up the pace. Do you see how everyone’s doubling their speed? Dear Aramis, he’s in a hurry to receive and embrace us.”

“That’s true,” d’Artagnan replied aloud. But to himself he added, Moreover, now he’s seen me, the sly fox, and will have time to prepare my reception.

Then the procession had passed, and the street was clear. D’Artagnan and Porthos went straight to the episcopal mansion, which was surrounded by a large crowd gathered to see the prelate when he returned. D’Artagnan noticed that this crowd consisted mainly of soldiers and wealthy citizens, and in the nature of his partisans he recognized the interests of his friend. In fact, Aramis wasn’t the type to chase puerile popularity; he had no interest in

being liked by people of no use to him. Women, children, and old men—in other words, those who would fill out the procession of the average bishop—were of no value to Aramis.

Ten minutes after the two friends had arrived at the bishop's mansion, Aramis appeared back from the procession like a victorious conqueror; the soldiers presented arms as if to a superior officer, and the town burghers saluted him as a friend, like a merchant prince rather than a prince of the church. There was in Aramis a resemblance to those Roman senators whose doorways were always crowded with clients and retainers. At the foot of the grand stairway he had a half-minute conference with a Jesuit who, to speak more discreetly, extended his head under the canopy. Then he entered his mansion, and the crowd began to disperse, to the sound of songs and loud prayers.

It was a beautiful day in Vannes, the aromas of the earth mingling with the scents of sky and sea. The city

exhaled happiness, joy, and strength. D'Artagnan sensed the presence of an invisible perfumed hand that, all-powerful, guided this strength, joy, and happiness, its scent pervading everything. "Oh ho!" he said to himself. "Porthos may have grown heavy, but Aramis has become great."

XXII

The Grandeur of the Bishop of Vannes

Porthos entered the bishop's mansion by a private door that opened only to friends of the household. It goes without saying that Porthos served as d'Artagnan's guide. The worthy baron behaved as if he was at home

wherever he went, but whether as a tacit recognition of the character and pious authority of Aramis, or a habit of respecting his moral ascendancy that had always made Porthos behave around him as a model soldier and good citizen, or for all these reasons, in the house of His Grandeur the Bishop of Vannes, Porthos maintained a marked reserve that d'Artagnan first noticed in his attitude toward the episcopal valets and footmen.

However, this reserve didn't go so far as to stop Porthos from asking questions, and so inquiries were made. They learned that His Grandeur had just returned to his private rooms, where he was preparing to appear, among his friends, as less majestic than he had to his flock. And in fact, after a quarter of an hour that d'Artagnan and Porthos spent staring at each other and uselessly twiddling their thumbs, a door into the audience hall opened and there stood His Grandeur, dressed in a prelate's receiving robes.

Aramis held his head high, like a

man with the habit of command, his hand on his hip atop purple skirts gathered for ease of movement. He still wore the slender mustache and pointed “royale” goatee of the time of Louis XIII. He entered with a waft of that delicate perfume common to all elegant and highborn men and women, an aroma of power that seems to emanate from them as a natural part of their being. But in this case the perfume seemed to partake of the sublime sanctity of holy incense that quenched rather than intoxicated, and inspired respect rather than desire.

Aramis, upon entering the hall, didn't hesitate a moment, and saying nothing, as no matter what he said would have felt cold given the occasion, he went straight to the musketeer so well disguised under the cloak of Monsieur Agnan and embraced him with a tender sincerity that no one could have thought either cool or affected.

D'Artagnan, for his part, embraced him with equal ardor. Porthos

squeezed Aramis's delicate hand between his great mitts, and d'Artagnan noticed that His Grandeur was careful to give him his left hand, probably knowing from experience that Porthos would grind the gemstones of his beringed right fingers into his flesh. Aramis, wary, had therefore presented only skin to be squeezed between those big hands rather than crushed against the facets of diamonds.

After these embraces, Aramis looked searchingly into d'Artagnan's face, and then offered him a well-lit chair. He himself sat in shadow from where he could observe the light on his guest's face. This tactic, common to ladies and diplomats, resembled the advantage a duelist seeks by maneuvering to face his opponent into the sun. D'Artagnan was familiar with this ploy but he pretended not to notice it. He felt he'd been caught, but for that very reason he also felt he was on the road to discovery, and it didn't matter to the old soldier if by seeming to be outmaneuvered he could still work his way around to

victory.

It was Aramis who began the conversation. "Ah, dear friend! Good old d'Artagnan!" he said. "What luck!"

"It wasn't luck, most reverend old scout, but friendship," said d'Artagnan. "I was looking for you, as I always look for you when I have some great venture in hand, or even just a few hours to share."

"Really!" said Aramis, unruffled. "You were looking for me?"

"Of course, he was looking for you, dear Aramis," said Porthos, "and the proof is that he tracked me down at Belle-Île. Isn't that touching?"

"Ah," said Aramis, "of course, to Belle-Île...."

Good, thought d'Artagnan. There goes my loose cannon Porthos, unwittingly firing the first shot of the battle.

"To Belle-Île," said Aramis, "to that backwater, that edge of nowhere! That is touching, in fact."

“And so, it was I who told him you were at Vannes,” continued Porthos in the same tone.

D’Artagnan smiled with a touch of irony. “I knew, of course,” he said, “but I wanted to see for myself.”

“To see what?”

“If our old friendship still held; if, seeing each other, our hearts, withered though they are by age, would beat with the old joy at meeting a friend.”

“And now you’re satisfied of that, aren’t you?” asked Aramis.

“More or less.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, Porthos’s first word to me was ‘Hush,’ and you....”

“Well? And I?”

“You gave me your blessing.”

“But my friend, what else would I do?” said Aramis with a smile. “That’s the most precious thing a poor

prelate like me can offer.”

“Come now, old friend.”

“No, seriously.”

“You know, they say in Paris that the Bishopric of Vannes is one of the richest in France.”

“Oh, you’re speaking of worldly goods?” said Aramis nonchalantly.

“Of course, I’m speaking of that. Don’t I always?”

“In that case, let’s talk about it,” said Aramis, smiling again.

“Then you admit you’re one of the wealthiest prelates in France?”

“Mon cher, since you’re auditing my accounts, I can tell you that Vannes is worth twenty thousand livres a year, more or less. It’s a diocese that contains one hundred and sixty parishes.”

“That’s pretty good,” said d’Artagnan.

“It’s superb!” said Porthos.

“However,” said d’Artagnan, with a direct look at Aramis, “I’ll wager you’re not planning to bury yourself here forever.”

“Pardon me—I’d hardly call this being buried.”

“But it seems to me anyone this far from Paris might as well be buried.”

“I’m getting old, mon ami,” said Aramis. “The noise and bustle of the city don’t suit me anymore. At fifty-seven one must seek calm and meditation, and I’ve found them here. What could be more beautiful and yet austere than *old Armorica*? 53 I’ve discovered here, cher d’Artagnan, everything that is the opposite of what I once loved, and that’s what one needs toward the end of life, the opposite of its beginning. Some of my old pleasures do find me here from time to time, but they don’t distract me from the approach of salvation. I am still of this world, and yet, every step I take, I’m closer to God.”

“Eloquent, wise, discreet: you are an accomplished prelate, Aramis, and I congratulate you.”

“But,” said Aramis, smiling, “you haven’t come here, cher ami, just to compliment me. Tell me, what brings you? Would I have the happiness to find that, somehow, you need something from me?”

“Thank God, no, dear friend, it’s nothing like that,” said d’Artagnan. “I’m rich and I’m free.”

“Rich?”

“Rich for me, that is, not like you or Porthos. I have about fifteen thousand livres a year.”

Aramis gave him a skeptical look; it was hard to believe, especially when he saw his old friend in such humble attire, that he’d found such a fortune. So, d’Artagnan, seeing that the hour for explanations had come, told the story of his exploits in England. During this account, he saw the prelate’s eyes shine and fingers twitch ten times over. As for Porthos,

it wasn't admiration or enthusiasm he showed for d'Artagnan, it was rapturous delight.

When d'Artagnan had finished his story, Aramis said, "Well, then?"

"Well, then!" said d'Artagnan. "You see I now have friends and property in England, and wealth laid by in France. If you so desire, I'll share it with you. That's why I came."

But as confident as he seemed, at that moment he couldn't quite meet Aramis's eyes. He let his gaze turn toward Porthos, as the blade yields to overwhelming force and seeks another line of attack.

"In that case," said the bishop, "you've donned strange traveling clothes, cher ami."

"Frightful, aren't they? But you'll understand that I preferred not to travel as a cavalier or a seigneur. Now that I'm rich, I'm miserly."

"And you say that you came to Belle-Île?" said Aramis without

warning.

“Yes,” d’Artagnan replied. “I knew that way I’d find Porthos—and you.”

“Me!” cried Aramis. “I haven’t been across the water in a year.”

“Oh?” said d’Artagnan. “I never thought to find you such a homebody.”

“Ah, cher ami! I must tell you I’m not the man I used to be. Riding a horse is uncomfortable and sailing is exhausting—I’m just a poor, ailing priest, always groaning and complaining, regarding all expense as waste, gradually succumbing to old age and speaking always of death. I survive, mon cher d’Artagnan, I merely survive.”

“I’m glad of that, my friend, as we’re probably going to be neighbors.”

“What?” said Aramis, with a surprise he didn’t even bother to conceal. “You, my neighbor?”

“Good lord, yes!”

“How’s that?”

“I’m going to buy some very profitable salt farms located between Piriac and Le Croisic. Imagine this, dear friend, a clear twelve percent return on investment, ever steady, always dependable, as the ocean, faithful and regular, brings a new deposit to my account every six hours. I’m the first Parisian to invest in such a venture, so keep this to yourself, if you please, and in a little while I’ll be able to share the details. I’m getting three leagues of the coast for thirty thousand livres.”

Aramis glanced at Porthos as if to ask if this was true, or if some snare was hidden in this apparent show of amiable confidence. But then, as if ashamed at having resorted to his poor auxiliary, he recouped his forces for a new assault on this novel defense. “I’d heard that you’d had some trouble at Court,” he said, “but that you’d gotten out of it as you get out of everything, mon cher d’Artagnan, with the honors of victory.”

“Me?” cried the musketeer, following it with a burst of laughter that didn’t quite cover his embarrassment, for Aramis’s remark indicated he knew something of his relations with the king. “Me? Ha! Tell me what you heard, if you would, Aramis.”

“Yes, I’d heard, this poor bishop lost in the provinces, that the king was having you assist with his love affairs.”

“With whom?”

“With Mademoiselle de Mancini.”

D’Artagnan exhaled with relief. “Well, I wouldn’t say no,” he replied.

“It seems that one morning the king took you over the bridge at Blois to talk with his ladylove.”

“It’s true,” said d’Artagnan. “So, you know that? Then you must also know that was the same day I turned in my commission.”

“Truly?”

“My friend, it couldn’t be more so.”

“That’s when you went to see the Comte de La Fère?”

“Yes.”

“And then me?”

“Yes.”

“And then Porthos?”

“Yes.”

“Was it just for a simple visit?”

“No; I wanted to see if you were at liberty to go with me to England.”

“Ah, yes, I understand—and then you went and accomplished alone, like a hero, what you wanted to propose to all four of us. I suspected something like that when I’d heard you were involved in the Restoration, and were seen at the receptions for King Charles, where he spoke to you like a friend, or rather, like a person to whom he owed an obligation.”

“But how the devil did you learn all that?” asked d’Artagnan, who feared

that Aramis's investigations might have extended further than he'd thought.

"Dear d'Artagnan," said the prelate, "my friendship is like the solicitude of the old night-watchman who keeps the little lighthouse on the end of the pier. Every night he lights a lantern for the boats returning from the sea. He's unnoticed behind his shutters, but he watches everyone with interest, calling them into harbor and keeping track of each one. I'm like that watchman; from time to time scraps of news come my way that remind me of all I once loved. I am the solitary friend of those who still ride the world's stormy seas, a poor watchman whom God has granted shelter in my little tower."

"And what have I done since England?" asked d'Artagnan.

"Ah, there you went over my horizon!" said Aramis. "I know nothing of you since your return, d'Artagnan; my eyes were clouded. I regretted that you didn't think of me

and wept at your forgetfulness. But I was wrong, for now I see you again, and it's wonderful, a time to celebrate, I solemnly swear. And how is Athos getting along?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And his young pupil?"

"Raoul?"

"Yes."

"He seems to have inherited the poise of his father Athos and the strength of his mentor Porthos."

"And on what occasion were you able to judge that?"

"Eh, my God! On the very eve of my departure."

"Really?"

"Yes, there was an execution on the Grève, and it provoked a riot. We found ourselves in the middle of that riot, and there was cause for some swordplay. He handled himself quite well."

“Oh? What did he do?” asked Porthos.

“First, he threw a man from a window as if he were no more than a cotton pillow.”

“Ho! That’s pretty good!” cried Porthos.

“Then he drew, pointed, cut, and thrust, just as we used to do back in the old days.”

“And what caused this riot?” Porthos asked.

D’Artagnan noticed that Aramis’s expression showed complete disinterest in Porthos’s question. “Oh,” he said, looking at Aramis, “it was on account of a couple of tax-farmers the king wanted hanged, two friends of Monsieur Fouquet.”

Only a slight frown indicated that the prelate had heard this.

“Oh ho!” said Porthos. “And what were their names, these friends of Monsieur Fouquet?”

“Messieurs d’Emerys and Lyodot,” said d’Artagnan. “Do you know those names, Aramis?”

“No,” said the prelate with disdain. “They sound like the names of coin-counters.”

“Exactly.”

“Wait. Monsieur Fouquet allows his friends to be hanged?” cried Porthos.

“And why not?” said Aramis.

“It just seems to me....”

“If those wretches were hanged, it was by the king’s orders,” said Aramis. “After all, Monsieur Fouquet, as Surintendant des Finances, doesn’t have power over life and death.”

“Just the same,” grumbled Porthos, “in Monsieur Fouquet’s place....”

Aramis realized that Porthos was about to say something foolish and interrupted. “But see here, cher d’Artagnan,” he said, “that’s enough talk about others; let’s speak a bit

about you.”

“But you already know all there is to say about me. On the contrary, let’s talk about you, dear Aramis.”

“I told you, my friend, that there’s nothing of Aramis left in me.”

“What about the Abbé d’Herblay?”

“Even less. You see before you a man whom God has taken by the hand and led to a position he never expected nor even hoped.”

“God?” asked d’Artagnan.

“Yes.”

“Huh! That’s strange; I’d been told it was Monsieur Fouquet.”

“Who told you that?” said Aramis, and not all his willpower could prevent a slight flush from rising to his cheeks.

“My faith! It was *Bazin*.” 54

“That dolt!”

“I wouldn’t call him a man of

genius, true, but that's what he told me, which is why I repeat it to you."

"I have never met Monsieur Fouquet," replied Aramis with a look as serene and pure as that of a young virgin who has never told a lie.

"But meeting him, or even knowing him, there's no harm in that," said d'Artagnan. "He's a very fine man, Monsieur Fouquet."

"Oh?"

"A great politician."

Aramis shrugged indifferently.

"An all-powerful minister."

"I report only to the king and the pope," said Aramis.

"Dame! Listen to this, then," said d'Artagnan in a tone of simple sincerity. "I'll tell you about it, because everyone around here swears by Monsieur Fouquet. The land is Monsieur Fouquet's; the salt-farm I'm going to buy is Monsieur Fouquet's; the island where Porthos does

topography is Monsieur Fouquet's; the garrison there is Monsieur Fouquet's; and the ships are Monsieur Fouquet's. So, it would scarcely surprise me if the appointment to your diocese came from Monsieur Fouquet. He's a different master than the king, of course, but just as powerful."

"Thanks be to God, I owe nothing to anyone, and belong to nobody but myself," Aramis replied, who during this speech watched d'Artagnan's every expression and Porthos's every nod and glance. But d'Artagnan was impassive and Porthos was immobile; all these skillful thrusts were parried by able adversaries, and none of them touched.

Nonetheless, the strain of the struggle was beginning to tell on everyone, and the announcement of supper was received gratefully by all three. Dining together changed the tone of the conversation, and besides, now that everyone was on their guard, they knew they would learn nothing more.

Porthos had understood none of the nuances; he'd stayed immobile because Aramis had asked him not to budge. For him, supper was only supper. But for Porthos, supper was enough, and the mealtime passed remarkably well.

D'Artagnan overflowed with cheer. Aramis surpassed himself in easy amiability. *Porthos ate like Pelops.* 55 War and finance were discussed, and love and the arts. Aramis seemed naïvely surprised at every mention of politics d'Artagnan dared risk. This unlikely naïveté increased d'Artagnan's mistrust, just as d'Artagnan's invincible nonchalance aroused the distrust of Aramis.

Finally, d'Artagnan deliberately dropped the name Colbert into the conversation. He'd reserved this as his final shot.

"Who is this Colbert?" asked the bishop.

Oh, now that's going too far, thought d'Artagnan. God's death, that's too much. Careful! And he told

Aramis everything about Colbert that he might want to know.

The supper, or rather the conversation between d'Artagnan and Aramis, lasted until one in the morning. At ten o'clock precisely, Porthos fell asleep in his chair and began snoring like an organ. At midnight he was awakened and sent to his bed. "Huh!" he said. "I seem to have fallen asleep. But your conversation was very interesting."

At one o'clock, Aramis led d'Artagnan to the room designated for him, the best in the episcopal mansion. Two servants were placed at his orders. "Tomorrow, at eight in the morning," said Aramis in taking leave of d'Artagnan, "we'll go riding with Porthos."

"At eight o'clock!" said d'Artagnan. "Why so late?"

"You know I need seven hours of sleep," said Aramis.

"You did say that."

“Bonsoir, cher ami!” And he embraced the musketeer warmly.

Once the door was shut firmly behind Aramis, d’Artagnan said, “Good! By five o’clock I’ll be up and around.”

Then, that resolution taken, he went to bed and began, as they say, “to put two and two together.”

XXIII

Porthos
Begins to be
Sorry *He'd*
Brought
d'Artagnan
With *Him*

N

d'Artagnan blown out his candle than Aramis, who'd been watching from behind his curtains for the last light to go out in his friend's room, tiptoed across the hall to Porthos's room. The giant, who'd been in bed for about an hour and a half, was sprawled across the quilt. He was in the happy calm of early sleep that, for Porthos, could resist the toll of bells and the thunder of cannon. His head moved as if to the gentle rocking of a ship at sea, and in another minute, he would start to dream.

The door of Porthos's room opened slowly under the pressure of Aramis's delicate hand. The bishop approached the sleeper; a thick carpet swallowed the sound of his footsteps, and besides, Porthos snored loudly enough to drown out any lesser noise. Aramis placed a hand on his shoulder and said, "Come, we must go, cher Porthos."

The voice of Aramis was soft and affectionate, but it wasn't asking, it was ordering. His touch was light, but its firmness conveyed danger. In his sleep, Porthos heard the voice and felt Aramis's hand, and he trembled. "Who's there?" he said in his giant's voice.

"Hush! It's me," said Aramis.

"You, dear friend! And why the devil do you wake me?"

"To tell you that you have to go."

"To go?"

"Yes."

"To where?"

"To Paris."

Porthos sat upright in bed and stared at Aramis in alarm. "To Paris?"

"Yes."

"A hundred leagues!" Porthos gasped.

"A hundred and four."

“Dear God!” sighed Porthos, falling back into bed and rolling over, like a child who hopes his nanny will go away and let him sleep another hour.

“Thirty hours on horseback,” Aramis continued resolutely. “You know there are good relays.”

Porthos kicked with one leg and groaned.

“Come now, cher ami,” insisted the prelate with a touch of impatience.

Porthos kicked with the other leg, then put both feet on the floor. “Must I go?” he said.

“It’s essential.”

Porthos rose to his feet and stomped forward like a statue.

“Hush!” said Aramis. “For the love of God, Porthos, you’ll wake someone up.”

“Ah! You’re right,” said Porthos in a voice of thunder. “I forgot. But don’t worry, I’ll be careful.” And as he said this, he dropped a heavy belt laden

with sword, pistols, and a purse whose crowns escaped and went bouncing across the floor in a prolonged clatter. The racket made Aramis's blood boil, but it just provoked Porthos into a loud burst of laughter. "What a riot!" he rumbled.

"Not so loud, Porthos, please!"

"You're right," he said, lowering his voice half a notch. "I was just thinking," Porthos continued amiably, "that we're never so slow as when we're in a hurry, and never so loud as when we want to be quiet."

"Yes, quite so, but let's give the proverb the lie, Porthos, and hurry along quietly."

"You can see I'm doing my best," said Porthos, pulling on his breeches.

"Very well."

"Is it really so urgent?"

"It's not just urgent, Porthos, it's serious."

"Oh? All right."

“D’Artagnan questioned you, didn’t he?”

“Me?”

“Yes, on Belle-Île.”

“Not at all.”

“Are you sure of that, Porthos?”

“Yes, by God!”

“Impossible. Think back.”

“He asked me what I was doing, and I told him, ‘Topography,’ because I couldn’t remember that other word you used.”

“Castrametation?” 56

“That’s the one! I never could remember it.”

“All the better! What else did he ask you?”

“He asked who Monsieur Gétard was.”

“What else?”

“Who was that Monsieur Jupenet.”

“But he didn’t see our plan of fortifications, I hope?”

“He did.”

“The devil you say!”

“Don’t worry, I’d rubbed out all your writing with a gum eraser. He couldn’t possibly realize you’d been kind enough to advise me on the task.”

“He has sharp eyes, our friend.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“I’m afraid he’s discovered everything, Porthos, and we must keep that from causing serious trouble. I ordered my people to close the house up tight so d’Artagnan can’t get out before dawn. Your horse is saddled, you’ll ride it hard to the first relay, and by five in the morning you’ll be fifteen leagues from here. Come.”

Aramis then dressed Porthos piece by piece as quickly as the most capable valet de chambre. Porthos, half groggy, half confused, just

apologized and let him do what he wanted. When he was ready, Aramis took him by the hand and drew him along, leading him carefully down the stairs, keeping him from bumping into doorways, turning and steering him as if Aramis was the giant and Porthos a dwarf, his body animated by Aramis's soul.

A horse was, in fact, waiting ready in the courtyard, and Porthos got into the saddle. Then Aramis himself took the horse by the bridle and led him through the yard across a scattering of manure, apparently intended to quiet its hoofbeats. At the same time, he was pinching its nostrils so it wouldn't blow or neigh.

Then, having arrived at the outer gate, he beckoned Porthos, who was ready to leave without asking why, and said into his ear, "Now, friend Porthos, ride without pause to Paris, eating, drinking, and sleeping in the saddle so as not to lose a minute."

"As you say; we won't stop."

"Here's a letter for Monsieur

Fouquet that, whatever the cost, he must have by noon tomorrow.”

“He’ll get it.”

“And keep one thing in mind, cher ami.”

“What’s that?”

“That what you’re racing after is your promotion to duke and peer.”

“Oh ho!” said Porthos, eyes sparkling. “In that case, I’ll do it in twenty-four hours.”

“Try it.”

“Then release the bridle, and forward, Goliath!”

Aramis let go of both bridle and nose. Porthos took the reins, applied the spurs, and the animal took off at a furious gallop.

As long as he could see Porthos disappearing into the night, Aramis followed him with his eyes; then, once he lost sight of him, he returned into the courtyard.

He peeked in at d'Artagnan's door, but nothing had changed. The footman posted outside had heard nothing and seen no lights. Aramis closed the door carefully, sent the footman to bed, and went to his own room.

D'Artagnan really suspected nothing; when he awoke in the morning at half past four, he still thought he was ahead of the game. Dressed in his night-shirt, he looked out his window into the courtyard, where day was just breaking. It was deserted; even the hens were still in their coop. No servants were visible, and all doors were yet closed. All quiet; good! thought d'Artagnan. I'm the first of the household to awaken. Time to get dressed. And d'Artagnan drew on his clothes. But this time he donned the costume of Monsieur Agnan in a way that avoided the bourgeois, almost clerical look he'd previously adopted, tightening, tucking, and buttoning it in a martial manner, cocking his hat with a bit of flair, and restoring the look of a cavalier whose lack had alarmed

Aramis so.

That done, as a friend of the house, or pretended friend, he presumed to let himself into Aramis's rooms, where he found his friend asleep—or pretending to sleep. A big book was open on his nightstand, and a reading candle still burned before its reflective silver plate. That was more than enough to prove to d'Artagnan how innocently the prelate had spent his evening, and how wise he'd been to rise early.

The musketeer then did to the bishop what the bishop had done to Porthos: he touched him on the shoulder. Evidently Aramis was feigning sleep, for instead of waking suddenly, he who slept so lightly required a second touch to arouse him. "Ah!" he said. "It's you. What a happy surprise! Faith, sleep had made me forget I had the good luck to have you here. What time is it?"

"I'm not sure," said d'Artagnan, a little embarrassed. "Early, I think. It's my damned old military habits that

make me rise with the day.”

“Were you hoping, by chance, to ride out so soon?” asked Aramis. “It seems too early to me.”

“We shall do as you like.”

“I thought we’d agreed we’d mount up around eight.”

“Perhaps so, but I was so eager to see you, I thought, the sooner the better.”

“And my seven hours of sleep?” said Aramis. “I’m warning you, I’d counted on that, and what I miss now I’ll have to make up later.”

“Maybe, but it seems to me you weren’t always such a slug-a-bed, old friend, and had more to do awake than asleep.”

“And that’s exactly why I treasure my sleep now.”

“Oh, confess that it wasn’t for more sleep that you wanted to delay till eight o’clock.”

“I was afraid you’d mock me if I told you the truth.”

“So, tell me.”

“All right! From six till eight I usually make my devotions.”

“Your devotions?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t think a bishop had such strict obligations.”

“A bishop, cher ami, must pay more attention to appearances than a lowly cleric.”

“Mordieux! Now there, Aramis, is a word that reconciles me to Your Grandeur. Appearances! That’s a musketeer’s way of looking at things. Long live appearances, Aramis!”

“Pardon me instead of congratulating me, d’Artagnan, for letting slip a word entirely too worldly.”

“Must I leave you, then?”

“I really must make my devotions,

cher ami.”

“All right, I’ll leave you, but for the sake of this pagan named d’Artagnan, make them as short as you can. I’m eager to see you.”

“Very well, d’Artagnan, I promise that in just an hour and a half....”

“An hour and a half of devotions? Come now, old friend, be reasonable. You can do better than that.”

Aramis laughed. “Ever charming, ever cheerful, ever young,” he said. “When you come to my diocese, even divine grace must step aside.”

“Bah!”

“And you know I could never resist your temptations; you’ll cost me my salvation, d’Artagnan.”

D’Artagnan pursed his lips. “Here,” he said, “I’ll take the sin on my account. Make the sign of the cross, say a few paters, and we’ll go.”

“Hush!” said Aramis. “We’re no longer alone; I hear someone

coming.”

“Well, send them away.”

“Impossible; I made the appointment yesterday. It’s the Principal of the College of Jesuits and the Superior of the Dominicans.”

“Your chiefs of staff. Very well.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’ll go wake up Porthos and wait in his company until you’ve finished your conference.”

Aramis didn’t start, or stare, or show any emotion in gesture or speech. “Go ahead,” he said. As d’Artagnan went toward the door, he added, “By the way, do you know the way to Porthos’s room?”

“No, but I’ll find it.”

“Go down the corridor and open the second door on the left.”

“Thanks! Au revoir.” And d’Artagnan went off in the direction Aramis had indicated.

Scarcely ten minutes passed before he returned. He found Aramis seated between the Principal of the College of Jesuits and the Superior of the Dominicans, *in exactly the situation he'd found him before in the inn at Crèvecoeur.* 57 This company didn't intimidate the musketeer.

"What is it?" asked Aramis serenely. "Do you have something to ask me about, cher ami?"

"I do," replied d'Artagnan, looking closely at Aramis, "because Porthos isn't here."

"Not here?" said Aramis, no less calmly. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, by God! I just came from his room."

"Where can he be, then?"

"I'm asking you."

"Have you enquired after him?"

"I did."

"And what did they tell you?"

“That Porthos often goes out in the morning without telling anyone and had probably left.”

“What did you do then?”

“I went to the stable,” said d’Artagnan nonchalantly.

“What for?”

“To see if Porthos had left on horseback.”

“And...?” asked the bishop.

“Well! One horse is missing, Goliath, from stall number five.”

This entire dialogue, it should be understood, was conducted with a touch of suspicion on the part of the musketeer, but with perfect complacency by Aramis.

“Ah! I see what’s happened,” said Aramis, after thinking for a moment. “Porthos has gone out to bring us a surprise.”

“A surprise?”

“Yes. The canal that links Vannes

with the sea is teeming with game—snipe and teal. It's Porthos's favorite hunting ground, and he'll bring us a dozen for dinner."

"Really?" said d'Artagnan.

"I'm sure of it. Where else would he be? I'd wager he took *an arquebus.*" 58

"It's possible," said d'Artagnan.

"Do yourself a favor, cher ami, mount a horse and go join him."

"You're right," said d'Artagnan, "I'll go."

"Do you want a guide?"

"No, thanks—Porthos is hard to miss. I'll ask around."

"Would you like an arquebus, as well?"

"Thank you."

"Have whichever horse you like saddled for you."

"I'll take the one I rode here from

Belle-Île.”

“Go ahead; my house is yours.”
Aramis rang and gave the orders to have the horse d’Artagnan wanted saddled. D’Artagnan followed the servant charged with executing this order. At the door, the servant stepped aside to allow d’Artagnan to pass, and as he did so he exchanged a glance with his master. A twitch of Aramis’s brow informed this agent that d’Artagnan was to be given everything he wished.

D’Artagnan mounted his horse, and Aramis heard the sound of the iron shoes clattering on the cobblestones. A moment later, the servant returned. “Well?” asked the bishop.

“Monseigneur, he’s following the canal that leads to the sea,” said the servant.

“Good!” said Aramis.

In fact, d’Artagnan, putting aside all suspicion, was galloping toward the ocean, hoping at every moment to see in the dunes or on the beach the

colossal silhouette of his friend Porthos. He imagined he saw hoofprints in every puddle; occasionally he thought he heard a gunshot. This illusion lasted for three hours, for two of which d'Artagnan searched for Porthos. At the end of the third, he returned to the bishop's mansion. "Now I'll finally catch up with him," he said, "and I'll find my two friends awaiting my return."

D'Artagnan was deceived. He no more found Porthos at the mansion than he had along the canal.

Aramis was waiting at the top of the stairs with a haggard look on his face. "Did my people fail to find you, mon cher d'Artagnan?" he called as soon as he saw the musketeer.

"No; did you send someone after me?"

"I am desolate, mon cher ami, at having sent you on a wild goose chase, but about seven o'clock the almoner of Saint-Paterne came by and told me he'd met du Vallon on his way out; he'd left quietly, not wanting

to bother the household, and told the almoner to tell me that he was afraid Monsieur Gétard would do something stupid in his absence, so he was going to take advantage of the morning tide to make for Belle-Île.”

“But I hardly think Goliath has carried him across four leagues of sea, do you?”

“It’s more like six,” said Aramis.

“Even less likely, then.”

“Which is why, cher ami,” said the prelate with a soft smile, “Goliath is back in the stable, happy for the rest and pleased to be out from under Porthos.”

In fact, the horse had been returned from the relay station on the orders of the bishop, who allowed no detail to escape him. D’Artagnan let himself appear to be satisfied by this explanation. He adopted a demeanor that quite hid the suspicions forming in his mind. He dined between Aramis and the Jesuit and across from the Dominican, smiling a great deal at

the latter, whose jolly fat face amused him. The meal was long and sumptuous: excellent Spanish wine, fresh oysters from Morbihan, succulent fish from the mouth of the Loire, enormous prawns from Paimbœuf, and delectable game from the heather along the shore.

D'Artagnan ate quite a bit and drank very little, while Aramis drank not at all, other than water. When they were done, d'Artagnan asked, "You offered me an arquebus?"

"Yes."

"Lend me one."

"Are you going hunting?"

"I think I might as well, while waiting for Porthos."

"Take whatever you like from the gun-room."

"Are you coming with me?"

"Alas, cher ami, that would be a great pleasure, but bishops are forbidden to hunt."

“Ah!” said d’Artagnan. “I didn’t know that.”

“Besides,” continued Aramis, “I have business until noon.”

“I’m on my own, then?” said d’Artagnan.

“Hélas, yes! But be back in time for dinner.”

“By God! You eat too well here for me to miss it.”

And with that d’Artagnan took his leave of his host, saluted his guests, and picked out an arquebus—but instead of going hunting, he rode straight to the docks at Vannes. He watched carefully to make sure he wasn’t followed but saw no one. Convinced that he hadn’t been trailed, he rented a small fishing boat for twenty-five livres and set off. And in truth, he hadn’t been shadowed—but a Jesuit brother, posted in the steeple of his church, had followed his steps all morning with the aid of a telescope. At a quarter past eleven, Aramis was informed that d’Artagnan

was headed for Belle-Île.

With the help of a north-northeast wind, d'Artagnan made a quick crossing to Belle-Île. As he approached, his eyes scanned the coast, hoping to see, either on the shore or atop the fortifications, the splendid attire of Porthos, or his vast silhouette against the lightly clouded sky. D'Artagnan looked in vain; he landed without having seen anything and learned from the first soldier he questioned that Monsieur du Vallon had not yet returned from Vannes. Then, without losing a moment, d'Artagnan turned his little boat and set sail back to Sarzeau.

The wind, of course, changes direction as the day passes, and had turned from north-northeast to southeast, which was nearly as good for the return to Sarzeau as it had been for the trip to Belle-Île. In three hours d'Artagnan was back on the continent, and two hours after that he had reached Vannes. Despite the speed of this trip, the entire time d'Artagnan was eaten up with

impatience, and the deck of the boat could testify to how he stamped and paced across it as he sailed. When he touched at the quay near the episcopal mansion, he disembarked with a bound.

He hoped to surprise Aramis by the rapidity of his return, planning to reproach him for his duplicity while retaining enough wit to terrify him into revealing at least part of his secret. He hoped, in short, that with an onslaught of speech that was like a bayonet charge on a redoubt he could alarm the crafty Aramis into making an admission.

But all he found at the entry hall of the mansion was the valet blocking the doorway and smiling smugly. "Where is monseigneur?" cried d'Artagnan, trying to push past him.

He was nearly successful, but then the valet found his feet and stood his ground. "Monseigneur?" he said.

"Yes, curse you. Don't you recognize me, fool?"

“Of course; you’re the Chevalier d’Artagnan.”

“Then, let me pass.”

“It’s pointless.”

“Why?”

“Because His Grandeur is no longer at home.”

“What do you mean, His Grandeur’s not home! Where is he, then?”

“Gone.”

“Gone?”

“Yes.”

“To where?”

“As to that, I know nothing—but perhaps this will inform Monsieur le Chevalier.”

“This? This what?”

“This letter which I was told to give to Monsieur.” And the valet drew an envelope from his lapel.

“What? Give me that, you animal!”
said d’Artagnan, snatching it from
him. At the first line he read, he
snarled, “Oh, yes! Now I see it all.”
He read the rest in an undertone:

Cher ami, an urgent matter has called
me to one of the parishes in my diocese. I
had hoped to see you before leaving but
gave up that hope when it occurred to me
that you’d probably spend two or three days
on Belle-Île with our dear Porthos. Have a
good time with him, but don’t try to out-
drink him at the table; that’s advice I’d
have given even to Athos in his best days.
Adieu, cher ami, and believe me when I say
I’m sorry I didn’t have the chance to spend
more time in your excellent company.

“God’s death!” cried d’Artagnan.
“I’ve been played. Idiot, imbecile,
triple fool that I am! I’ve been tricked
like a monkey handed an empty nut.
But we’ll see who laughs last!” And,
wiping the smug smile from the
valet’s face with a blow, he dashed
out of the episcopal mansion.

*Ferret, good trotter though he was,
wasn’t the mount for these*

circumstances. 59 D'Artagnan hired a post horse and soon taught it, with a touch of the spurs and a flick of the hand, that deer aren't the fastest runners in creation.

XXIV

In Which
d'Artagnan
Rides,
Porthos
Snore, and
Aramis
Counsels

The events just recounted, while Monsieur Fouquet, having locked his door as usual, was working in the office of his house at Saint-Mandé, a carriage drawn by four horses dripping with sweat galloped into its courtyard. This carriage must have been expected, for three or four lackeys rushed to its door and opened it as Monsieur Fouquet rose from his desk and went to his window. A man emerged painfully from the carriage, stepping with difficulty from the running board to the ground while leaning on the lackeys' shoulders. He'd no sooner said his name than the lackey he wasn't leaning on rushed up the stairs and into the vestibule. This man was running to inform his master, but he didn't even have to knock on the door, for Fouquet was standing on the threshold. "Monseigneur the Bishop of Vannes!" said the lackey.

"Good!" said Fouquet. Then, leaning over the banister of the stairs

as Aramis began to climb them, he said, "You, dear friend! So soon!"

"Yes, in person, Monsieur; but battered and broken, as you see."

"You poor man!" said Fouquet, offering Aramis his arm, which he took and leaned upon, while the servants withdrew respectfully.

"Bah!" Aramis replied. "It's nothing, just so long as I'm here; the main thing is that I've made it and found you when I arrived."

"Speak quickly," said Fouquet, closing the door of the private office behind Aramis and himself.

"We're alone here?"

"Completely alone."

"No one can listen in? No one can hear us?"

"No, I assure you."

"Monsieur du Vallon has arrived?"

"Yes."

“And you received my letter?”

“Yes, and the matter must be serious if it requires your presence in Paris at a time when you’re needed so urgently elsewhere.”

“You’re right, it couldn’t be more serious.”

“Thanks, now what’s it all about? But by God, before everything, catch your breath, dear friend! You’re pale and trembling.”

“I’m in pain, yes, but good Lord, pay no attention to me. Didn’t Monsieur du Vallon tell you anything when he gave you the letter?”

“No, I heard a great noise, went to the window, and saw a giant on horseback at the foot of the stairs. I went down, he gave me the letter, and his horse fell over dead.”

“And he?”

“He fell with the horse; they got him out from under it and carried him upstairs to a spare bedroom. Once I’d read the letter, I went up to see if he

had further news, but he'd fallen so heavily asleep it was impossible to wake him. I took pity on him, ordered that his boots be removed, and he be left to rest."

"Good; now here is what this is all about, Monseigneur. You met Monsieur d'Artagnan in Paris, didn't you?"

"Indeed, and he's a man of intelligence and courage, even though he was responsible for the death of my friends Lyodot and d'Emerys."

"Alas, so I'd heard; at Tours I met the courier who was bringing me Gourville's letter and Pellisson's dispatches. Have you reflected on that event, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"And did you understand that it was a direct attack on your sovereignty?"

"You think so?"

"Oh, yes, I think so!"

“Well! I admit that dark idea had occurred to me, too.”

“Don’t ignore that idea, Monsieur, hearken to it, in the name of heaven. Now, back to d’Artagnan.”

“I’m listening.”

“Under what circumstances did you meet him?”

“He came to me for money.”

“With an order?”

“From the hand of the king.”

“Directly?”

“Signed by His Majesty.”

“See, there! Well! D’Artagnan came to Belle-Île disguised as a steward, on the pretext of buying some salt-farms. Now, d’Artagnan has no other master than the king, so he came on behalf of the king. And he saw Porthos.”

“Who is this Porthos?”

“Pardon, my mistake. At Belle-Île

he saw Monsieur du Vallon, and he now knows, as well as you or I do, that Belle-Île has been fortified.”

“And you think it was the king who sent him?” said Fouquet thoughtfully.

“Assuredly.”

“And d’Artagnan, in the king’s hands, is a dangerous weapon?”

“The most dangerous there is.”

“So I thought, at first meeting.”

“How’s that?”

“I immediately wished he was mine.”

“If you judged him at first sight the bravest, cleverest, and most skillful man in France, you judged him well.”

“We must have him at any price!”

“D’Artagnan?”

“Don’t you agree with me?”

“I may agree with you, but we can’t

get him.”

“Why not?”

“Because we missed our chance. He was dissatisfied at Court, and we could have taken advantage of his dissatisfaction, but instead he went over to England where he was instrumental in the Restoration. That earned him a fortune, after which he came back to the service of the king. And if he’s returned to that service now, he’s been well paid to do so.”

“We’ll just pay him more, that’s all.”

“Oh, no, Monsieur, pardon me! D’Artagnan lives by his word, and that word, once given, isn’t taken back.”

“So, what do you conclude from all this?” Fouquet asked anxiously.

“That this is the moment to parry a terrible blow.”

“And how will we parry it?”

“Think ... d’Artagnan must come back to report on his mission to the

king.”

“Oh, we’ve got time, then!”

“What do you mean?”

“You had a good lead on him, I presume?”

“Ten hours, more or less.”

“Well, then, with ten hours....”

Aramis shook his head. “See the clouds racing across the sky, that swallow diving through the air? D’Artagnan is faster than those clouds and that bird; d’Artagnan is the wind itself.”

“Come, now!”

“I tell you there is something superhuman about that man, Monsieur. He’s my age, and I’ve known him for thirty-five years.”

“So?”

“So! Listen to my calculations, Monsieur: I sent Monsieur du Vallon to you at two in the morning, so Monsieur du Vallon left eight hours

ahead of me. When did he arrive?"

"Around four o'clock."

"So, you see, I gained four hours on him, though Porthos is a hardy horseman who killed eight mounts on the road—I found their bodies. Me, I rode post for fifty leagues, but I have the gout and the gravel and who knows what else? It was killing me, so I dismounted at Tours and rolled the rest of the way in a carriage, half dead, thrown this way and that, forward and back, always with four horses at a furious gallop, so that I gained four hours on Porthos. However, d'Artagnan doesn't weigh three hundred pounds like Porthos, or have the gout and the gravel like me—he's not a horseman, he's a centaur. D'Artagnan, though he left for Belle-Île when I left for Paris, giving me ten hours' lead, despite all that, d'Artagnan will arrive only two hours behind me."

"What about the accidents of travel?"

"He will have no accidents."

“What if he runs out of horses?”

“He’ll run faster than the horses would have.”

“Good God! What a man!”

“Yes, he’s a man whom I admire and love, because he’s good, loyal, and true; I admire him because he represents the culmination of his kind of human. But though I love him, though I admire him, I also fear him and would forestall him. In short, Monsieur, d’Artagnan will be here in two hours, so get ahead of him, ride to the Louvre, and see the king before the king sees d’Artagnan.”

“And what shall I say to the king?”

“Nothing—just give him Belle-Île.”

“Oh, Monsieur d’Herblay!” Fouquet cried. “To have such a plan crushed at a single blow!”

“If one plan is crushed, we’ll proceed with another! Never despair, Monsieur, just go—and quickly.”

“But that garrison so carefully

assembled, the king will change it all!"

"That garrison, Monsieur, belonged to the king when you bought Belle-Île; within two weeks it was yours, and it will still be yours once it's dispersed. Let it go, Monsieur. Do you see a problem with having an army in a year where now you have but two regiments? Dispersed, your garrison of today will win you new partisans from the garrisons at La Rochelle, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, or wherever they're sent.

"Go to the king, Monsieur, time is passing, and as it passes d'Artagnan flies like an arrow along the high road."

"Monsieur d'Herblay, you know your every word blossoms in the garden of my thought. I'll go to the Louvre."

"This very moment, right?"

"I ask only enough time to change my clothes."

“Remember that d’Artagnan doesn’t need to pass through Saint-Mandé, he’ll go straight to the Louvre, and there’s another hour gone from the time we have left.”

“But d’Artagnan doesn’t have my English horses. I’ll be at the Louvre in twenty-five minutes.” And, without wasting another second, Fouquet gave the orders for his departure.

Aramis had only enough time to say to him, “Return as quickly as you go, before I die of impatience.”

Five minutes later, the superintendent was flying toward Paris.

Meanwhile, Aramis asked to be shown to the room where Porthos was sleeping. As he left Fouquet’s office, he was enveloped in the arms of Pellisson, who had just learned of his arrival and hurried to see him. Aramis returned the hasty embrace with friendly dignity, and then, on the landing, asked, “What’s that I hear from above?”

Indeed, they could hear a deep, dull rumble like the growl of a hungry tiger or impatient lion. “Oh, that’s nothing!” said Pellisson with a smile.

“But what...?”

“It’s just Monsieur du Vallon snoring.”

“Of course,” said Aramis, “only he is capable of making such a noise. Allow me, Pellisson, to go see if he needs anything.”

“Can I go with you?”

“Please do!”

They entered the room together. Porthos was lying on a bed, his face more purple than red, his eyes swollen and mouth gaping. The rumble escaping from the deep recesses of his chest rattled the windows. The sight of the mighty muscles tensing in his face and neck, his hair soaked with sweat, the energetic rise and fall of his chest and shoulders, couldn’t help but inspire a certain admiration, for here

was strength that seemed nearly godlike. Porthos's herculean legs and feet, in swelling, had split his stockings, as the might of his enormous body assumed the rigidity of stone. Porthos stirred no more than *the granite giant on the plains of Agrigento*. 60

At Pellisson's order, a valet had cut away Porthos's boots, for no power in the world could have pulled them off. Four lackeys had tried in vain, pulling at them as if at a capstan. They hadn't even managed to wake him. His boots cut away, his legs had fallen back on the bed. They removed the rest of his outer clothes, carried him into a bath where he soaked for an hour, dressed him in white linen, and carried him back to bed, all with effort and trouble that would have roused a dead man. But Porthos never opened an eye and didn't stop for a moment the mighty organ of his snoring.

As for Aramis, with his brave and restless nature, he tried to outface his fatigue and work with Gourville

and Pellisson, but passed out in the armchair he'd insisted they bring him. He was carried off and put to bed in a neighboring chamber, where the repose of sleep soon calmed his nervous mind.

XXV

Monsieur Fouquet *T*akes Action

Monsieur Fouquet raced to the Louvre in a carriage drawn at a gallop by his English horses. Meanwhile,

The king was working with Colbert when suddenly he became pensive. The two death sentences he'd signed upon assuming the throne occasionally came back to haunt him. They were two black veils of

mourning that he looked through when his eyes were open, and two bloodstains he saw when they were closed. "Monsieur," he said suddenly to the intendant, "it sometimes seems to me that those two men whom you had me condemn weren't guilty of so great a fault."

"Sire, they were chosen from among the corrupt tax-farmers, a herd that needed to be culled."

"Chosen by whom?"

"By necessity, Sire," Colbert replied coldly.

"Necessity! An imperious word!" murmured the young king.

"An imperious goddess, Sire."

"They were close friends of the superintendent, weren't they?"

"Yes, Sire, friends who would have given their lives for Monsieur Fouquet."

"And thus, they gave them, Monsieur," said the king.

“That’s true, but fortunately they gave them in vain—though that wasn’t their intention.”

“How much money had those men embezzled?”

“Ten million, perhaps, six of which were recovered from them.”

“And that money is now in my coffers?” asked the king with a certain repugnance.

“It is, Sire, but that confiscation, though it threatened Monsieur Fouquet, did him no real damage.”

“And you think, Monsieur Colbert...?”

“That if Monsieur Fouquet was willing to raise a troop of brigands against Your Majesty to rescue his friends from execution, he’d raise an army to escape his own punishment.”

The king fixed his confidant with one of those looks that are like lightning in a storm, a glance that lights the very depths of a man’s conscience. “I’m astonished,” he said,

“that, thinking Monsieur Fouquet capable of such things, you never gave me advance warning.”

“A warning of what, Sire?”

“Tell me first, clearly and precisely, what you think, Monsieur Colbert.”

“About what?”

“About the conduct of Monsieur Fouquet.”

“I think, Sire, that Monsieur Fouquet, not content with gathering money to himself, as Monsieur de Mazarin did, thus depriving Your Majesty of part of his power, wants in addition to gather to him all those friends of pleasure and easy living who make what the lazy call poetry, but what politicians call corruption. I think that, by buying the loyalty of Your Majesty’s subjects, he is encroaching on the royal prerogative, and will inevitably end, if he’s allowed to continue, by relegating Your Majesty to weakness and obscurity.”

“And what are such projects called, Monsieur Colbert?”

“Monsieur Fouquet’s projects, Sire?”

“Yes.”

“They’re considered *crimes of lèse-majesté*.” 61

“And what do we do to those who commit lèse-majesté?”

“They are arrested, judged, and punished.”

“Are you certain Monsieur Fouquet has the intention of committing the crimes you impute to him?”

“I’ll say more than that, Sire—he is beginning to carry them out.”

“Well, then! I return to my question, Monsieur Colbert.”

“What was that, Sire?”

“What are you warning me about?”

“Pardon me, Sire, but before I say that I have one more thing to add.”

“Speak.”

“We have clear, obvious, and palpable proof of treason.”

“What?”

“I’ve just learned that Monsieur Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Île-en-Mer.”

“Ah! Really!”

“Yes, Sire.”

“You’re sure of that?”

“Perfectly. Do you know, Sire, how many troops are on Belle-Île?”

“Faith, no. Do you?”

“I do not, Sire, so I propose that Your Majesty send someone to Belle-Île.”

“Such as?”

“Me, for example.”

“What would you do on Belle-Île?”

“Learn if it’s true that Monsieur Fouquet, like the old feudal lords, is

building siege-proof walls.”

“And what reason would he have to do that?”

“No reason except someday to defend himself against his king.”

“But if that’s so, Monsieur Colbert,” said Louis, “we must act immediately, as you say; we must arrest Monsieur Fouquet.”

“Impossible!”

“I thought I told you, Monsieur, not to employ that word in my service.”

“Suppressing that word in Your Majesty’s service doesn’t change the fact that Monsieur Fouquet is Superintendent of Finance.”

“So?”

“And consequently, as holder of that office, he has in his hand all of parliament, the entire army is in his pay, he’s the patron of every writer, and the nobles are at his beck and call.”

“In other words, I can do nothing against Monsieur Fouquet?”

“Absolutely nothing—at least right now, Sire.”

“You’re a sad disappointment as an advisor, Monsieur Colbert.”

“Not at all, Sire! From now on I won’t stop at just pointing out threats to Your Majesty.”

“All right, then! How do we topple the colossus? Just push?” And the king laughed bitterly.

“His power comes from money, Sire; kill him with money.”

“What if I discharge him from office?”

“Too difficult, and it’s not the way to go.”

“Then what is?”

“Ruin him, Sire, as I said.”

“How would I do that?”

“Opportunities will arise; seize

those opportunities.”

“Give me an example.”

“Here’s one: His Royal Highness Monsieur is to be married, and his wedding must be magnificent. This is a good opportunity for Your Majesty to ask Monsieur Fouquet for a million; Monsieur Fouquet, who pays twenty thousand livres up front when he owes only five thousand, will certainly find the million Your Majesty asks for.”

“That’s good,” said Louis XIV. “I will ask him for it.”

“If Your Majesty would be so good as to sign an order, I’ll collect the money myself.” And Colbert presented the king with a paper and pen.

At that moment, the usher opened the door and announced Monsieur le Surintendant. Louis paled. Colbert dropped the plume and withdrew behind the king, as if to enfold him in the dark wings of an evil angel.

The superintendent made his entry like a born man of the Court, for whom a single glance tells him all he needs to know of a situation. This situation wasn't encouraging for Fouquet, no matter how conscious he was of his strength. Colbert's small dark eyes, dilated with envy, and the glittering gaze of Louis XIV, inflamed with anger, warned him of urgent danger.

Courtiers are as sensitive to the atmosphere of the Court as old soldiers who can distinguish, from the sounds of wind and foliage, the distant tramp of an armed troop, and can tell, just by listening, how many men are on the march, how many sabers are rattling and how many cannons are rolling. Fouquet, therefore, had only to note the quality of the silence that had fallen upon his arrival to find it fraught with menace.

The king allowed him enough time to advance to the middle of the room, for his youthful uncertainty prevented him from taking the initiative. Fouquet seized the advantage,

saying, "Sire, I was impatient to see Your Majesty."

"Why is that?" asked Louis.

"To bring him good news."

Colbert, though lacking Fouquet's grandeur of person and generosity of heart, otherwise resembled him in many ways. He had the same brilliance, the same insight into other men, plus that power of self-possession that gives hypocrites time to think and prepare their attacks. He guessed that Fouquet was attempting to forestall the blow he was preparing to unleash, and his eyes gleamed darkly.

"What news?" asked the king.

Fouquet placed a parchment scroll on the table. "If Your Majesty would just cast his eyes over this," he said.

The king unrolled the scroll. "These are plans?" he said.

"Yes, Sire."

"And what kind of plans?"

“For a new kind of fortification, Sire.”

“Ah ha!” said the king. “So, you’re concerning yourself with strategy and tactics, Monsieur Fouquet.”

“I concern myself with everything that might be useful to Your Majesty’s reign,” replied Fouquet.

“Very pretty!” said the king, looking over the drawings.

“As Your Majesty can undoubtedly see,” said Fouquet, indicating the sketches, “here are the walls with their fortified strongpoints, and there the advance outworks.”

“And what is all this beyond, Monsieur?”

“The sea.”

“The sea? All around?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“And what is the name of this place of which you show me the plan?”

“Sire, it is Belle-Île-en-Mer,” Fouquet simply replied.

At this name, Colbert made a movement so abrupt that the king turned to quell him with a cold stare. Fouquet didn’t appear to react at all to Colbert’s movement, nor to notice the king’s look.

“Then, Monsieur,” continued Louis, “you have fortified Belle-Île?”

“Yes, Sire, and I’ve brought Your Majesty all the estimates and accounts,” replied Fouquet. “I have spent sixteen hundred thousand livres in this operation.”

“For what reason?” replied Louis coldly, imitating the sullen glare of his intendant.

“A reason easy enough to explain,” responded Fouquet, “given that Your Majesty was at odds with England.”

“Yes, but since the restoration of King Charles II, I’ve made an alliance with her.”

“Only a month ago, Sire, as Your

Majesty well knows, but the fortification of Belle-Île was begun six months before that."

"But now it's been rendered useless."

"Sire, fortifications are never useless. I had fortified Belle-Île against Monck, Lambert, and all those citizens of London who wanted to play soldier. Belle-Île is equally well fortified against the Dutch, whom Your Majesty and the English are bound to oppose."

The king fell silent, glancing at Colbert, and then said, "Belle-Île, I believe, belongs to you, does it not, Monsieur Fouquet?"

"No, Sire."

"To whom, then?"

"To Your Majesty."

Colbert felt a wave of vertigo, as if a great abyss had opened before his feet.

Louis gaped in admiration, either

at the genius of Fouquet or his apparent devotion. "Explain yourself, Monsieur," he said.

"Easily done, Sire. Belle-Île is one of my domains, and I fortified it with my own money, but as nothing in the world forbids a subject from offering a humble present to his king, I offer Your Majesty the full usage of the domain, though the ownership remains mine. Belle-Île, fortified for war, ought to be occupied by the king, and Your Majesty should henceforth be able to retain a dependable garrison there."

Colbert nearly lost his balance and slid to the floor. He had to lean against a wooden column just to keep from falling.

"This plan you place before me is an example of great skill in the art of war, Monsieur," said Louis XIV.

"The plans weren't drawn up by me, Sire," said Fouquet. "I was advised by many officers, but the plans themselves are the work of a distinguished military engineer."

“His name?”

“Monsieur du Vallon.”

“Monsieur du Vallon?” Louis replied. “I don’t know him. It’s unfortunate, Monsieur Colbert,” he continued, “when I don’t know the names of the men of talent who honor my regime.” As he said these words he turned slowly toward Colbert, who dwindled before the assault, sweat bursting from his brow, lips speechless, spirit crushed.

“You will remember that name,” Louis XIV added.

Colbert bowed, paler than his cuffs of white Flemish lace.

Fouquet continued, “The masonry is of Roman concrete; the architects mixed it using an ancient and most durable formula.”

“And the cannons?” asked Louis.

“Oh, Sire, that’s Your Majesty’s business! I wouldn’t presume to place artillery in my domain unless Your Majesty was in command of it.”

Louis began to waver indecisively between the resentment he felt toward this powerful man and the pity he felt for the man he'd outmaneuvered, the accountant who seemed a mere shadow of the powerful minister. But the awareness of his duty as a king prevailed over his feelings as a man. He waved a finger across the paper. "Execution of these plans cost you a lot of money?" he said.

"I believe I had the honor of telling Your Majesty the amount."

"Remind me, I forgot."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres! You are enormously wealthy, Monsieur Fouquet."

"It's Your Majesty who's wealthy," said the superintendent, "since Belle-Île is Your Majesty's."

"Yes, and thank you; but wealthy as I am, Monsieur Fouquet...." The king paused.

“Well, Sire?” asked the superintendent.

“I foresee a moment when I’ll run out of money.”

“You, Sire?”

“Yes, me.”

“And when will that be?”

“Tomorrow, I believe.”

“Would Your Majesty do me the honor to explain?”

“My brother is going to marry the English king’s sister.”

“Well, Sire?”

“Well! I must give the young princess a reception worthy of the granddaughter of Henri IV.”

“That’s entirely fair, Sire.”

“So, I need money.”

“No doubt about it.”

“I’m going to need....” Louis XIV hesitated. The sum he was going to

name was the same that he'd had to refuse to Charles II. He turned to Colbert to deliver the blow. "Tomorrow I'll need..." he repeated while looking at his intendant.

"A million," Colbert said brutally, thrilled to be able to resume his revenge.

Fouquet turned his back on the intendant to better attend the king. He waited until the king repeated, or rather murmured, "A million."

"Oh, Sire!" replied Fouquet disdainfully. "A million! What will Your Majesty do with a million?"

"But, it seems to me ..." said Louis XIV.

"That's no more than is spent on the wedding of a minor German prince."

"But Monsieur...."

"Your Majesty will need at least two million. The horses alone will cost five hundred thousand livres! I shall have the honor of sending Your

Majesty sixteen hundred thousand livres—tonight.”

“What?” said the king. “Sixteen hundred thousand livres!”

“Patience, Sire,” replied Fouquet without so much as a glance at Colbert. “I know that’s still four hundred thousand short of the two million. But Monsieur l’Intendant here,” he said, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder at Colbert, “has in his coffers nine hundred thousand livres of mine.”

The king turned to look at Colbert, but the latter could say only, “Uhh....”

“Monsieur, here,” continued Fouquet, still speaking of Colbert without looking at him, “has received in the last week another sixteen hundred thousand livres. He paid a hundred thousand to the French Guards companies, seventy-five thousand to the hospitals, twenty-five thousand to the Swiss Guards, one hundred thirty thousand for provisions, a thousand for arms, and ten thousand for general expenses; if

I'm not mistaken, that leaves a balance of nine hundred thousand."

Then, half turning toward Colbert, Fouquet said, in the scornful tone of an executive to his inferior, "Make sure those nine hundred thousand livres are handed to His Majesty tonight. In gold."

"But," said the king, "doesn't that add up to two and a half million livres?"

"Sire, the extra five hundred thousand will be pocket money for His Royal Highness. Do you hear, Monsieur Colbert? Tonight, before eight o'clock."

And with these words, and a respectful salute to the king, the superintendent withdrew from the royal presence without a single glance at the envious man whom he'd just taken to the cleaners. Colbert tore his Flemish lace in a rage and bit his lips till they bled.

Fouquet was barely out the door when the usher rushed in past him,

announcing, "A courier from Brittany for His Majesty."

"Monsieur d'Herblay was right!" muttered Fouquet as he consulted his watch. "An hour and fifty-five minutes. I was just in time!"

XXVI

In Which
d'Artagnan
Finally Gets
His Hands
on his
Captain's
Commission

Twho the usher referred to when announcing a messenger from Brittany, for it was easy enough to recognize him. It was d'Artagnan, clothing dust-covered, face ruddy, hair dripping with sweat, legs stiff, painfully climbing the stairs, his bloody spurs ringing on every step.

The moment he entered the doorway, he saw the superintendent. Fouquet greeted with a smile this man who, if he'd arrived one hour earlier, would have brought him ruin or death. D'Artagnan found within his greatness of soul and his inexhaustible vitality enough composure to remember how well the superintendent had received him; he returned the greeting, more from benevolence and compassion than from respect. On his lips was the word that had been repeated in vain so many times to the Duc de Guise: "Fly!" But to speak that word would have been to betray his oath; and

moreover, to say that word on the threshold of the king's study in the presence of a Royal Guard wouldn't save anyone.

Thus, d'Artagnan contented himself with saluting Fouquet without speaking to him, and went on in, where he found the king torn between surprise at the final words of Fouquet and pleasure at the return of d'Artagnan.

Though d'Artagnan wasn't a courtier, his eyes were just as sharp and quick, and upon entering he immediately read the painful humiliation printed on Colbert's face, which was only exacerbated when he heard the king say, "So, Monsieur Colbert, according to the superintendent, you have nine hundred thousand livres at the ready?" Colbert, choking, bowed without answering.

D'Artagnan's eyes and ears took in the entire scene at once. The first word Louis XIV directed at his musketeer, as if in deliberate contrast

to his previous utterance, was an affectionate, "Bonjour!"

His next word was a dismissal of Colbert. The latter, livid and staggering, left the king's study, while d'Artagnan curled the ends of his mustachios. "Your disarray is just the kind of thing I love to see on my servants," said the king to d'Artagnan, admiring the wear and tear of the road on his envoy's clothing.

"In fact, Sire," said d'Artagnan, "I thought my presence at the Louvre sufficiently urgent to excuse presenting myself this way."

"You bring me important news, then, Monsieur?" asked the king with a smile.

"Sire, here's the entire story in three words: Belle-Île is fortified, and well-fortified, too. It has a double wall, a citadel, and two flanking forts, there are two swift corsairs in her port, and her shore batteries await only cannon."

“I know all that, Monsieur,” replied the king.

“Er—Your Majesty knows all that?” said the musketeer, stupefied.

“I have the plan of Belle-Île’s fortification,” said the king.

“Your Majesty has the plan...?”

“Right here.”

“Indeed, Sire,” said d’Artagnan, “that’s it, the same one I saw there.” D’Artagnan’s face darkened. “Ah, I see now!” he said reproachfully. “Your Majesty didn’t trust me to handle it alone and sent someone else as well.”

“What does it matter, Monsieur, how I learn what I know, as long as I know it?”

“Maybe so, Sire,” said the musketeer, without even trying to disguise his discontent, “but I must say to Your Majesty that it’s hardly fitting for me to ride so recklessly, risking my neck twenty times over, just to be received upon arrival with

such news. Sire, when one distrusts people, or thinks them insufficient, one shouldn't employ them." And d'Artagnan, with a distinctly military flourish, stamped his foot on the floor in a cloud of bloody dust.

The king watched him calmly while inwardly enjoying this first triumph. "Monsieur," he said after a moment, "the state of Belle-Île is not only known to me, Belle-Île is now mine."

"Fine, Sire, fine—I ask only one thing more," d'Artagnan replied. "My discharge!"

"What! Your discharge?"

"Absolutely. I'm too proud to take the king's silver without earning it, or worse, without deserving it. My discharge, Sire!"

"Oh ho!"

"My discharge, or I'll leave without it."

"Are you angry, Monsieur?"

"I have a right to be, mordieux! I

cling to my saddle for thirty-two hours, riding day and night, breaking all records, I arrive stiff as a corpse, only to find someone else got here ahead of me. Enough! I'm clearly useless. My discharge, Sire!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Louis XIV, laying his white hand on the musketeer's dusty arm, "what I've just told you has no bearing on what I promised you. To give my word is to keep it." And the young king, going to his desk, opened a drawer and removed a paper folded and sealed.

"Here is your commission as Captain of the King's Musketeers," he said. "You've earned it, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan eagerly opened the letter and looked it over twice. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"And this commission," continued the king, "is awarded to you, not solely for your mission to Belle-Île, but also for your brave intervention on the Place de Grève. There, also, you served me bravely and well."

“Ah!” said d’Artagnan, who despite his self-control couldn’t prevent a blush from rising to his cheek. “You know about that, too, Sire?”

“Yes, I know it.” The king had a penetrating gaze and infallible judgment when it came to reading a conscience. “You have something more to tell me,” he said to the musketeer. “Come, speak frankly with me, Monsieur. You know I said I always want you to be honest with me.”

“Well, Sire! All I have to say is that I’d rather be named Captain of the Musketeers for having charged at the head of my company to silence a battery or take a town, than for getting two sad wretches hanged.”

“Is that true, what you just told me?”

“And why would Your Majesty suspect me of deceiving him, I must ask?”

“Because, if I’ve judged you at all well, Monsieur, I can hardly think

you'd be sorry for having drawn your sword on my behalf."

"Well, this time you're wrong, Sire, and very much so. Yes, I am sorry about having drawn my sword this time because of what resulted; two poor people are dead, Sire, who couldn't defend themselves, and were neither your enemies nor mine."

The king was silent for a moment, then said, "And your companion, Monsieur d'Artagnan, is he sorry as well?"

"My companion?"

"Yes, you weren't alone, it seems to me."

"Alone? Where?"

"On the Place de Grève."

"No, Sire," said d'Artagnan, embarrassed that the king might suspect that he wanted all the glory that should be rightfully shared with Raoul. "No, *mordieux*! As Your Majesty says, I had a companion, and a good one."

“A young man?”

“Yes, Sire, a young man. I must compliment Your Majesty on how well informed he is, from first to last. Is it Monsieur Colbert who brings the king such thorough reports?”

“Monsieur Colbert has told me nothing but good of you, Monsieur d’Artagnan, and would have been ill received if he’d done otherwise.”

“Ah! That’s fine.”

“He also spoke nothing but good of this young man.”

“That’s as it should be,” said the musketeer.

“In fact, he said the young man is a real hero,” said Louis XIV, to see if he could arouse some jealousy.

“A hero indeed, Sire,” said d’Artagnan, delighted at the opportunity to speak well about Raoul before the king.

“Do you know his name?”

“I should think so!”

“So, you know him?”

“Only for about twenty-five years, Sire.”

“But he’s no older than that!” said the king.

“Well, Sire, that’s because I’ve known him since birth.”

“Really?”

“Sire,” said d’Artagnan, “Your Majesty questions me with such suspicion that I think it must derive from someone else. Did Monsieur Colbert, who informs you so well, forget to tell you that this young man is the son of my closest friend?”

“The Vicomte de Bragelonne?”

“Exactly, Sire—the Vicomte de Bragelonne’s father is the Comte de La Fère, who was instrumental in the restoration of King Charles II. Oh, Bragelonne springs from a valiant race, Sire!”

“Then he’s the son of that seigneur who came to meet me, or rather to meet with Monsieur de Mazarin, to offer an alliance on the behalf of King Charles II?”

“Precisely.”

“And you say this Comte de La Fère is a brave man?”

“Sire, he’s a man who drew his sword on the behalf of the king your father more times than there have been days in Your Majesty’s life.”

This time it was Louis XIV who was taken by surprise. “Very well, Monsieur d’Artagnan! And this Comte de La Fère is your friend?”

“For about forty years, yes, Sire. I didn’t just meet him yesterday, Your Majesty.”

“Would you be pleased to see this young man, Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“Delighted, Sire!”

The king struck a bell, and an usher appeared. “Call Monsieur de

Bragelonne,” said the king.

“What? He’s here?” said d’Artagnan.

“He’s on guard duty today at the Louvre with the gentlemen’s company of Monsieur le Prince.”

The king had scarcely finished before Raoul presented himself, and, seeing d’Artagnan, smiled one of those charming smiles that appear only on the lips of youth. “Come, now,” d’Artagnan said familiarly to Raoul, “the king will allow you to embrace me; only first give His Majesty your thanks.”

Raoul bowed so graciously that Louis, who was pleased by all superiorities that didn’t outdo his own, admired his good looks, vigor, and modesty. “Monsieur,” said the king to Raoul, “I have asked Monsieur le Prince to give you up to me; I’ve received his reply, and as of this morning you belong to me. Monsieur le Prince is a good master, but I dare to hope you won’t lose by the change.”

“Yes, Raoul, don’t worry, the king has his good points,” said d’Artagnan, who had divined Louis’s character and could toy with his self-esteem—within limits, of course, keeping to the proprieties, and flattering when he seemed to be mocking.

“Sire,” said Bragelonne in a soft and charming voice, with the easy eloquence inherited from his father, “it’s not just from today that I belong to Your Majesty.”

“Oh, I know that!” said the king. “You mean the exploit on the Place de Grève. On that day, indeed, you belonged to me, Monsieur.”

“Sire, it’s not of that day I speak; I wouldn’t dare to recall such a trivial service in the presence of a man like Monsieur d’Artagnan. I speak of an experience of great significance to my life that consecrated me, at the age of sixteen, to the devoted service of Your Majesty.”

“Oh ho!” said the king. “And what was this experience, Monsieur, tell me?”

“It was this: when I was leaving on my first campaign, on my way to join the army of Monsieur le Prince, Monsieur le Comte de La Fère accompanied me as far as Saint-Denis, to the tomb of Louis XIII at the base of the steps in the basilica vault, where God will not, I hope, send his successor for many long years. There he made me swear on the ashes of our noble masters to serve our royalty, as represented by and incarnated in you, Sire—to serve it in thought, word, and deed. For the last ten years, Sire, I haven’t had many opportunities to keep that oath, but I am Your Majesty’s sworn soldier, nothing less, and by calling me nearer I don’t change my master, only my garrison.” Raoul fell silent and bowed.

Though he was done, the king continued to listen. “Mordioux!” cried d’Artagnan. “That was well said, wasn’t it, Your Majesty? He comes of a noble race, Sire, a grand race!”

“Yes,” murmured the king, delighted but not daring to show his

emotions, touched by contact with such a naturally aristocratic character. "Yes, Monsieur, you speak the truth: wherever you were, you were the king's. But by changing your garrison, believe me, you'll find an advancement of which you're worthy."

Raoul saw that was all the king had to say to him, and with that perfect tact that characterized his refined nature, he bowed and withdrew.

"Do you have anything more to report to me, Monsieur?" said the king when he found himself alone with d'Artagnan.

"Yes, Sire, and I've kept this news for last because it's sad and will clothe the royalty of Europe in mourning."

"What are you telling me?"

"Sire, in passing through Blois, a sorrowful word echoed from the château to my ear."

"Really, you're frightening me,

Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Sire, that word was spoken by a footman who wore black crêpe on his arm."

"For my uncle Gaston d'Orléans,* perhaps?"

"Sire, he has taken his last breath."

"And I, uninformed!" cried the king, who in his royal vulnerability felt insulted by not being told the news.

"Oh, don't be angry, Sire!" said d'Artagnan. "Not the couriers of Paris nor the messengers of the rest of the world can keep up with your servant; the courier from Blois won't be here before two o'clock, and he was riding well, I assure you, when I passed him just beyond Orléans."

"My uncle Gaston," murmured Louis, pressing his hand to his forehead, and expressing in those three words all the mixed feelings of a lifetime.

"Yes, Sire. And so it goes," said

d'Artagnan philosophically, responding to the royal thought. "The past escapes us."

"So true, Monsieur, so true. But we still have the future, thank God, and we can try to make it less sad."

"I count on Your Majesty for that," said the musketeer with a bow. "And now...."

"Yes, quite right, Monsieur—I forgot you just rode a hundred and ten leagues. Go, Monsieur, take good care of the best of my soldiers ... and when you're rested, return and receive my orders."

"Sire, absent or present, I am always yours." D'Artagnan bowed and went out.

Then, as if he'd only ridden from Fontainebleau, he went off through the Louvre to find Raoul de Bragelonne.

XXVII

A Lover and *His* Mistress

W

the wax-lights flickered in the
Château de Blois and the dead
body of Gaston d'Orléans, the last
prince of the former reign; while the
citizens of the town composed their
epitaph for him, which was far from
complimentary; while *Madame the*
dowager princess, 62 outside the
funeral hall, forgetting that in her

youth she'd so loved the dead man that she'd fled her paternal palace to elope with him, considered her life, reckoning her calculations of interest and totaling her sacrifices of pride; meanwhile, elsewhere in the château, other interests and other prides were anxiously being reckoned in light of the prince's passing.

Not the mournful tolling of the bells, nor the chants of the singers, nor the gleam of the candles through the windows, nor the preparations for the burial, none of these things had the power to distract two people who stood inside a window of the château's inner courtyard, *a window we already know* 63 that admitted light into a room in what was called the Little Apartments. A joyful ray of sunshine—for the sun didn't seem concerned about the loss France had just suffered—a ray of sunshine fell upon the pair, drawing perfume from the surrounding flowers and scattering reflections from the gold wallpaper. These two people who were occupied, not by the death of the prince, but by the concerns that

death provoked, were a young woman and a young man.

The latter was a man in his mid-twenties favored with two large and long-lashed eyes that could make his expression seem open or veiled depending on their play. He was small of stature and dark of skin and smiled with a wide and handsome mouth above a pointed and unusually mobile chin. He sometimes leaned very lovingly toward his companion, who, it must be said, didn't recoil nearly as quickly as strict propriety might require. This young woman, whom we already know, for we've seen her before at this same window by the light of the same sun, was comprised of a singular mix of finesse and intelligence, charming when she laughed and beautiful when she was serious—but we must admit, she was more often charming than beautiful.

The pair seemed to have reached the climax of a half-mocking, half-serious discussion. "Come, Monsieur Malicorne,"* said the young woman,

“are you finally prepared to be reasonable?”

“You think it’s so easy, Mademoiselle Aure, to do what we’d like,” replied the young man, “when we really do only what we can.”

“Oh, fie! Always hiding behind your words.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. Leave behind your lawyer’s logic, my dear.”

“Another impossibility. I must be who I am, Mademoiselle de Montalais.”*

“And I must be a lady, Monsieur Malicorne.”

“Alas, I know it well, and your rank overwhelms me. I can tell you nothing.”

“I, overwhelm you? Never! Now tell me what you came here to say. I’ve waited long enough.”

“Very well! I must obey.”

“I’m eager to hear it, in fact.”

“First, ‘Monsieur’ is dead.”

“Peste! Old news. Where do you come from with that?”

“I come from Orléans, Mademoiselle.”

“And is that the only news you bring?”

“Not at all! I also come to tell you that Princess Henrietta of England is on her way to marry King Louis’s brother and become the new Madame.”*

“Really, Malicorne, you’re quite insufferable with your news of the last century. If you continue to mock me like this, I’ll have you thrown out.”

“Oh! Will you?”

“Yes, you’re really quite exasperating.”

“Now, now! Have patience, Mademoiselle.”

“You’re just pretending to have

something important to say. If you don't, then be off."

"Tell me what you want to know, and I'll answer honestly. Well, as honestly as I can."

"You know what I want to hear! Am I to be appointed a maid of honor, a position I foolishly expected you to use your leverage to obtain?"

"Me?" Malicorne lowered his eyes, took her hands, and gave her an impish look. "And what leverage do you imagine a poor lawyer might have?"

"Your father's income can't be less than twenty thousand livres a year, Monsieur Malicorne."

"He doesn't do badly for a provincial, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"And he's deep in the confidence of the Prince de Condé."

"A confidence that comes of lending freely to monseigneur."

“In short, you’re the best-connected rogue in the province.”

“You flatter me.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.”

“How so?”

“Because you say I have leverage when I say I have none.”

“Seriously, now—what of my appointment?”

“Well, then! Your appointment?”

“Will I have it or not?”

“You ... shall have it.”

“But when?”

“Whenever you want.”

“Where is it, then?”

“In my pocket.”

“What! In your pocket?”

“Yes.” And with a sly smile,

Malicorne drew from his pocket a letter that Montalais pounced upon and read avidly.

And as she read, her face lit up. “Malicorne!” she cried. “You really are a good lad.”

“How so, Mademoiselle?”

“Because you could have made me pay for this appointment—but you didn’t.” And to needle him, she burst out laughing.

But Malicorne bravely withstood the attack. “I have no idea what you mean,” he said.

Then it was Montalais who was taken aback.

“I’ve declared my feelings to you,” continued Malicorne. “You’ve told me three times, laughing, that you don’t love me—but you kissed me once without laughing, and that’s all I need.”

“All?” said the proud and enticing Montalais in a tone of wounded pride.

“Absolutely all, Mademoiselle,” replied Malicorne.

“Fah!”

This single syllable conveyed as much in anger as the young man might have expected in gratitude. But he calmly shook his head. “Listen, Montalais,” he said, seeming not to care whether this familiarity pleased his mistress or not, “there’s no point in pretending.”

“Isn’t there?”

“Indeed not, since, in the year I’ve known you, you could have had me thrown out twenty times if I didn’t please you.”

“Really? Why would I do that?”

“I’ve certainly been impertinent enough to deserve it.”

“Well, that’s true enough.”

“Therefore, you have to admit that I’ve pleased you,” said Malicorne.

“Monsieur Malicorne!”

“Let’s not fight about it. Since you kept me around, you must have had a reason for it.”

“As long as you don’t think it’s because I love you!” hissed Montalais.

“Fine. I’m even sure that at this moment you hate me.”

“Never have you spoken more truly!”

“Fine! I can’t stand you, either.”

“I’ll make a note of it.”

“I’m sure. You think I’m tactless and foolish, and that I find you shrill and short-tempered, always twisting up your face in anger. Right now, you’d rather jump out the window than let me kiss the tip of your finger, while I’d rather throw myself from the highest tower than touch the hem of your gown. And yet, five minutes from now you’ll love me and I will adore you. That’s just how it goes.”

“I say you’re wrong.”

“And I swear it’s the truth.”

“Fah!”

“But none of this means a thing. The truth is, you need me, Aure—and I need you. When you want to be merry, I make you laugh, and when it suits me to be in love, I need only look at you. I’ve brought you the royal appointment you desired, and eventually you’ll give me something that I want.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you! But at the moment, my dear Aure, I don’t want a single thing, so relax.”

“What an awful man you are, Malicorne! Here I was, ready to rejoice in my appointment, and you go and ruin it.”

“No loss! You’ll have plenty of time to rejoice in it after I’ve gone on my way.”

“Go, then.”

“I will—but first, a final word.”

“What?”

“You should cheer up and find your good mood again. Sulking just makes you ugly.”

“What a brute you are!”

“Look, we might as well be honest with each other.”

“You’re hard-hearted, Malicorne!”

“And you’re ungrateful, Montalais!”

The young man turned, leaned on the windowsill, and stared out at nothing.

Montalais picked up a book and opened it.

Malicorne stood up, brushed his hat on his sleeve, and straightened his black doublet.

Montalais, while pretending to read, watched him from the corner of her eye. “Fine!” she cried furiously. “Resume your phony air of respectability. Now you’ll sulk for a week.”

“Two weeks, Mademoiselle,” said Malicorne with a bow.

Montalais shook her fist at him. “Monster!” she said. “Oh, if I was a man!”

“What would you do to me?”

“I’d strangle you!”

“Oh, excellent,” said Malicorne. “You know ... I think I’m finally beginning to want something.”

“And what do you want, Monsieur Demon? That I should lose my soul to anger?”

Malicorne turned his hat respectfully in his hands—and then suddenly he dropped it, grabbed the young woman by the shoulders, drew her to him and kissed her with two burning lips surprisingly ardent for a man who’d pretended indifference. Aure began to cry out, but it was swallowed in the kiss.

Annoyed and upset, the young woman pushed Malicorne back against the wall. “Suit yourself!” said

Malicorne philosophically. "That kiss will hold me for a good six weeks. Adieu, Mademoiselle! Accept my humble farewell." And he took three steps toward the door.

"Ooh! No!" cried Montalais, stamping her foot. "You're not going anywhere! Stop! I command you!"

"You command me?"

"Yes. Am I not mistress here?"

"Of my mind and my soul, utterly."

"Fine things for me to have! The mind is bone dry and the soul is foolish."

"Careful, Montalais—I know you," said Malicorne. "You're going to fall in love with your humble servant."

"Well! ...Maybe I will," she said, draping her arms around his neck more with childish indolence than with voluptuous abandon. "Maybe I will. After all, I still have to thank you."

"For what?"

“My appointment! For isn’t it my entire future?”

“And mine as well.”

Montalais stared at him. “You know what’s frightful?” she asked. “I can never tell when you’re speaking seriously.”

“I’ve never been more serious. I wanted to go to Paris, and now that you’re going there—we are going there.”

“So that’s the real reason you did this, selfish one?”

“What would you have, Aure? I can’t do without you.”

“Well, to tell the truth, it’s the same with me. But you’re still a man with a heart of stone.”

“Aure, dearest Aure, take care—you know your insults just make me adore you.” And, saying this, Malicorne approached the young woman a second time.

Just then a footstep echoed from

the stair. The young folk were so close they'd have been surprised in each other's arms if Montalais hadn't violently shoved Malicorne against the door as it was opening. There was a thump, a loud cry, and curses from the other side.

It was Madame de Saint-Rémy* who uttered the cry and the curses; the unlucky Malicorne had half crushed her in the doorway. "This rascal again?" shrilled the old woman. "It's always him!"

"On the contrary, Madame," replied Malicorne respectfully. "This is the first time it's been me in a week."

XXVIII

In Which
the *True*
*H*eroine of
*T*his Story
Finally
Appears

B Saint-Rémy on the stairs was her daughter, Mademoiselle Louise de La Valtière. She heard the explosion of maternal fury, and guessing the reason for it, she entered the room trembling. There she saw as expected the unhappy Malicorne, whose woeful expression would have aroused sympathy or amusement in anyone not already angry. He had entrenched himself behind a large chair to fend off Madame de Saint-Rémy's attacks. He couldn't reach her by words, as she was louder than he, so he had to rely on the eloquence of his gestures.

But the old lady heard and saw nothing, as she'd long considered Malicorne an archenemy, and her anger was sufficient that it overflowed from Malicorne onto his accomplice, Montalais, who got her share. "And you, Mademoiselle, do you think I won't warn Madame about what's going on with one of her maids of honor?"

“Oh, no, Mother!” cried Mademoiselle de La Vallière. “Please, spare her....”

“Hold your tongue, Mademoiselle, and don’t waste effort on the behalf of the unworthy. That an honest girl like you is subject to such a bad influence is trouble enough, I won’t have you defending her into the bargain.”

“But, really,” said Montalais, rebelling at last, “I can’t imagine why you should treat me this way. I haven’t done anything to injure you, have I?”

“Oh, Mademoiselle? And this lowborn loafer, what good is he doing here? I ask you!” retorted Madame de Saint-Rémy.

“He’s not here for good or ill, Madame, he just comes to see me, that’s all.”

“So, so?” said Madame de Saint-Rémy. “Well, Her Royal Highness will be informed, and she will decide.”

“Even so,” replied Montalais, “I don’t see why Monsieur Malicorne should be forbidden to have intentions toward me, if his intentions are honorable.”

“Honorable intentions, with a face like that!” snapped Madame de Saint-Rémy.

“I thank you on behalf of my face, Madame,” said Malicorne.

“Come, Louise,” continued Madame de Saint-Rémy. “We must warn Madame that while she mourns for her husband, even as we all grieve for the loss of the master of our château, in this house of sorrow there are people who amuse themselves and rejoice.”

“Oh!” cried the accused pair in a single voice.

“A maid of honor! A maid of honor!” cried the old lady, raising her hands to the heavens.

“Well! That’s where you’re wrong, Madame,” said Montalais,

exasperated. "I'm no maid of honor, at least not to Madame."

"Have you resigned your position, Mademoiselle? Very well! I'm surprised by your integrity, but I can only applaud your honesty."

"I haven't resigned, Madame, but I have taken service elsewhere."

"Among the bourgeoisie? Or the lawyers?" asked Madame de Saint-Rémy with disdain.

"You should know, Madame, that I'm not a young lady to serve citizens or clerks," said Montalais. "Instead of this miserable court in which you vegetate, I go to a court nearly royal."

"Ha ha! A royal court," said Madame de Saint-Rémy, choking on a laugh. "A royal court—what do you think of that, Daughter?" And she turned toward Mademoiselle de La Vallière, whom she hoped to incite against Montalais, but who, contrary to her mother's impulse, gave a look intended to conciliate Montalais and Madame de Saint-Rémy.

“I said a nearly royal court, Madame,” replied Montalais, “as Princess Henrietta of England, who is to be the wife of His Royal Highness Monsieur, is not a queen. I said nearly royal and that’s quite correct, as she’ll be sister-in-law to the king.”

A lightning bolt striking the Château de Blois couldn’t have stunned Madame de Saint-Rémy more than Montalais’s words. “Wh-what’s that you say about Her Royal Highness Madame Henrietta?” stammered the old lady.

“I say that I’m joining her household as a maid of honor. That’s what I say.”

“A maid of honor!” cried Madame de Saint-Rémy with despair and Mademoiselle de La Vallière with joy.

“Yes, Madame. A maid of honor.”

The old lady bowed her head as if this blow were too much for her. However, she straightened almost immediately to fire a final shot at her adversary. “Oh, yes,” she said, “we

often hear talk of such future promises, flattering ourselves with vain hopes until, at the last moment, we see what we counted upon disappear like mist and steam."

"Ah, but Madame, the credit of my protector is rock solid, and a promise from him is a deed done."

"And this protector, oh so powerful, would it be indiscreet to inquire as to his name?"

"Mon Dieu, not at all. It is monsieur, here," said Montalais, indicating Malicorne, who, throughout this scene, had maintained perfect sang-froid and an almost comical dignity.

"Monsieur, here!" cried Madame de Saint-Rémy with an explosion of hilarity. "Monsieur is your protector! The man whose credit is rock solid, whose promises are deeds done, is Monsieur Malicorne?"

Malicorne bowed.

As for Montalais, her only response

was to draw the letter of appointment from her purse and present it to the old lady. "Here is the appointment," she said.

It was the final blow. As soon as she saw the official parchment, the good woman clasped her hands together, an indescribable expression of despair and envy distorted her face, and she had to sit down to avoid passing out.

Montalais wasn't so petty as to rejoice overmuch in this victory by crushing her vanquished enemy, especially since this enemy was her friend's mother; she accepted her triumph but didn't revel in it. Malicorne was less generous; he leaned back in an armchair in a pose of insolent over-familiarity that, two hours earlier, would have gotten him a swift whack with a stick.

"Maid of honor to the young Madame!" repeated Madame de Saint-Rémy, still unable to believe it.

"Yes, Madame, thanks to the influence of Monsieur Malicorne,

here.”

“It’s incredible!” repeated the old lady. “Doesn’t it seem incredible, Louise?”

But Louise, distracted, didn’t answer. She stood, dreaming, one hand to her brow, and sighed.

“Tell me, Monsieur,” Madame de Saint-Rémy said suddenly, “however did you obtain such an appointment?”

“By asking for it, Madame.”

“Asking who?”

“One of my friends.”

“And you have such good friends at Court that you have that much credit with them?”

“Dame! Apparently.”

“And might we know the names of these friends?”

“I didn’t say friends, Madame, just a friend.”

“And what’s this friend called?”

“Peste, Madame, what are you thinking? When one has a friend as powerful as mine, you don’t risk losing him by flaunting his name.”

“You’re quite right, Monsieur, not to mention a name that might not exist.”

“In any case,” said Montalais, “whether the friend exists or not, the appointment certainly does, and that’s the point of the issue.”

“Then I suppose,” said Madame de Saint-Rémy with the grimace of a cat about to scratch, “that when I found Monsieur here just now....”

“Well?”

“He was bringing you your appointment.”

“That’s right, Madame—quite so.”

“Nothing could be more proper, then.”

“So I think, Madame.”

“And I was wrong, it seems, to

reproach you, Mademoiselle.”

“Very wrong, Madame—but I’m so used to your reproaches that I forgive you.”

“In that case, Louise, we should withdraw, don’t you think?”

“What, Madame?” said La Vallière, with a shiver. “What did you say?”

“You weren’t listening, my child?”

“No, Madame, I was thinking.”

“About what?”

“A thousand things.”

“You’re not angry with me, are you, Louise?” said Montalais, taking her hand.

“And why would you think that, my dear Aure?” replied the young woman in a voice soft and musical.

“By Our Lady!” said Madame de Saint-Rémy. “If she was a bit angry at you, poor girl, she could hardly be blamed.”

“Dear God, why’s that?”

“It seems to me she’s as pretty as you, and of as good a family.”

“Mother!” Louise cried.

“A hundred times more beautiful, Madame, though not of a better family,” said Montalais. “But that doesn’t explain why she should be mad at me.”

“Do you think it right for her to be buried in Blois while you go to shine in Paris?”

“But, Madame, I’m not stopping Louise from following me to Paris; on the contrary, I’d love for her to come.”

“Yet it seems to me that Monsieur Malicorne, who is all-powerful at Court....”

“Alas, Madame,” said Malicorne, “it’s everyone for himself in this sad world.”

“Malicorne!” warned Montalais. Then, leaning over the young man, she whispered, “Keep Madame de

Saint-Rémy busy, either by arguing with her or making up; I need to talk to Louise.” And a gentle press of her hand rewarded him for his obedience.

Malicorne groaned and turned toward Madame de Saint-Rémy while Montalais spoke to her friend, an arm draped around her neck: “Let’s hear it. What were you thinking? Is it true you won’t love me any more if I go away to shine, as your mother says?”

“Of course not!” replied the young woman, blinking back tears. “No, I’d be happy for your happiness.”

“Happy! You look like you’re ready to cry.”

“Do we cry only from envy?”

“Ah, yes! I understand—I’m going to Paris, and the word Paris brings to mind a certain young cavalier.”

“Aure!”

“A certain cavalier who formerly lived in Blois and now lives in Paris.”

“I don’t know what’s wrong with

me, really, I'm just overcome."

"Cry, then, since you can't find a smile for me."

Louise raised a face streaming softly with tears, rolling one after another, glittering like diamonds.

"Come, confess," said Montalais.

"What should I confess?"

"To what's making you cry, for we don't cry without a reason. I'm your friend; whatever you want me to do, I'll do it. Malicorne has more pull than you—or he—thinks! Do you want to come to Paris?"

"Oh, my heart!" said Louise.

"Do you want to come to Paris?"

"To stay here alone, in this old château, no more to hear your sweet songs, to press your hand, to run with you in the gardens—oh, it will be so tedious that I'll die in just days!"

"Do you want to come to Paris?"

Louise sighed.

“That’s not an answer.”

“How am I supposed to answer you?”

“Yes or no; that’s not so hard, it seems to me.”

“Oh! You’re going to be so happy there, Montalais!”

“Which means, I suppose, that you’d like to be where I’ll be?”

Louise said nothing.

“Stubborn thing!” said Montalais. “Do we keep secrets from our friends? Confess that you want to come to Paris, confess that you’re dying to see Raoul de Bragelonne again!”

“I can’t confess that.”

“Then you’re in the wrong.”

“Why?”

“Because ... do you see this appointment?”

“Of course, I see it.”

“Well! I’ll get you one just like it.”

“From who?”

“From Malicorne.”

“Aure, are you serious? Is that even possible?”

“Dame! Here is Malicorne, and what he’s done for me, he’ll just have to do for you.”

Malicorne had heard his name spoken twice and was delighted to have an excuse to turn away from Madame de Saint-Rémy. “What is it, Mademoiselle?”

“Come here, Malicorne,” said Montalais with a commanding gesture.

Malicorne obeyed.

“Another appointment like this one,” said Montalais.

“How’s that?”

“Another appointment like this one. Did I mumble?”

“But....”

“I must have it!”

“Oh ho! You must?”

“Yes.”

“It isn’t possible, is it, Monsieur Malicorne?” said Louise in her soft voice.

“Dame! If it’s for you, Mademoiselle....”

“For me. Yes, Monsieur Malicorne, it would be for me.”

“And if Mademoiselle de Montalais asks for it as well....”

“Mademoiselle de Montalais does not ask for it, she requires it.”

“Well! I see I must obey, Mademoiselle.”

“With her name on it?”

“We shall try.”

“No weasel words. Louise de La Vallière shall be a maid of honor to

Madame Henrietta within a week.”

“Just as you say!”

“Within a week, or....”

“Or?”

“Or take back your appointment, Monsieur Malicorne. I won’t go without my friend.”

“Aure!” cried Louise.

“All is well, you can keep your appointment. Mademoiselle de La Vallière shall be a maid of honor.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“I can hope to go to Paris?”

“Count on it.”

“Oh, Monsieur Malicorne, how grateful I’ll be!” cried Louise, clapping her hands in joy.

“Little liar!” said Montalais.
“Trying to make me think you were no longer in love with Raoul.”

Louise blushed like a rose in May, but instead of answering, she went to embrace her mother. “Madame,” she said to her, “did you hear? Monsieur Malicorne is going to have me appointed a maid of honor!”

“Monsieur Malicorne is a prince in disguise,” said the old lady. “He is all-powerful.”

“Would you like to be a maid of honor as well?” Malicorne asked Madame de Saint-Rémy. “I might as well appoint everyone while I’m at it.”

And on that note, he went out, leaving the old lady with mouth open but empty, *as Tallemant des Réaux would say.* 64

“Here we go,” murmured Malicorne as he went down the stairs. “This is going to cost me another thousand livres, but there’s no way around it; my friend Manicamp* does nothing for free.”

XXIX

Malicorne and Manicamp

Two characters into the story, and the connection between them, deserves some explanation to the reader. We will therefore relate a few details about Monsieur Malicorne and Monsieur de Manicamp.

Malicorne, as mentioned, had come from Orléans to bring the

appointment for Mademoiselle de Montalais, the arrival of which had produced such a sensation in the Château de Blois. Orléans was where, at the moment, Monsieur de Manicamp was abiding. A singular person, this Monsieur de Manicamp: a young man of intelligence, but always penniless, always needy, though he had free access to the purse of Monsieur le Comte de Guiche,* one of the deepest purses of the period.

This access was due to Manicamp having been the childhood companion of the Comte de Guiche, and though a poor dependent of the noble household of *Marshal Grammont*, 65 Monsieur de Manicamp had learned to make a way for himself despite having no prospects of his own. With a wisdom beyond his years, from early childhood he had taken the blame for all the follies of the young Comte de Guiche. If his noble companion stole some fruit intended for Madame la Maréchale, or broke a window, or hurt a hunting dog, Manicamp declared himself guilty of the crime and

suffered the punishment, which was none the softer because it fell upon an innocent. But over time this system of loyal sacrifice had paid off. And now, instead of wearing the drab clothing compelled by his father's lack of fortune, Manicamp's wardrobe was brilliant, superb, like that of a young lord with an income of fifty thousand livres.

Not that he was a man coarse of character or corrupt of will, no, his turn of mind was philosophical, or rather indifferent to personal ambition, unconcerned with rank or hierarchy. The only thing he cared about was having money to spend. But in that regard, Monsieur de Manicamp was a bottomless pit.

About three or four times a year the Comte de Guiche's purse ran empty, and when de Guiche was drained, his purse and pockets turned out, and he declared it would be a fortnight before the paternal generosity replenished them, Manicamp, drained like the purse, went to bed and stayed there. On

these occasions he refused to eat and sold off his fine clothes on the pretext that, since he was in bed, he didn't need them.

During this low tide of exhaustion, the Comte de Guiche's purse slowly refilled, and, once replenished, overflowed once more upon Manicamp, who bought new clothes, put them on, and resumed his former life.

This eccentric habit of selling off his clothes for a quarter of what they were worth had made him a hero in certain circles in Orléans, a city that, in truth, we'd be hard pressed to say why he'd chosen it as the abode of his low tides. Provincial ne'er-do-wells with no more than six hundred livres a year were always waiting to take advantage of his sudden clothing sales. Among these local fops was our friend Malicorne, the son of an Orléans city alderman from whom the Prince de Condé, needy as the Condés always were, regularly borrowed money at ruinous interest. Monsieur Malicorne managed the

paternal loans, which meant, in those times of loose fiscal morality, that following the example of his father he also loaned out money for short terms at high interest, earning a good eighteen hundred livres a year on top of the six hundred afforded him by his father's generosity. With twenty-four hundred livres to squander on whatever follies he liked, this made Malicorne the king of the young dandies of Orléans.

However, unlike Manicamp, Malicorne was frightfully ambitious. He loved from ambition, spent out of ambition, and might yet ruin himself through ambition. Malicorne was resolved to establish himself at any price, and his chosen means was to find for himself from the petty nobility both a mistress and a friend.

The mistress was Mademoiselle de Montalais, cruel in matters of amour but from a noble family, and that was what mattered to Malicorne.

The friend lacked all friendship, but he was the favorite of the Comte

de Guiche, himself a favorite of “Monsieur,” the king’s brother, and that sufficed for Malicorne.

But ambition was expensive. Among such expenses, Mademoiselle de Montalais cost him, in ribbons, gloves, and charming gifts, a thousand livres a year. Manicamp cost him, in cash loaned but never repaid, twelve to fifteen hundred livres a year. Taken together, that left nothing for Malicorne.

Ah, but we’re mistaken! For he still had access to his father’s treasury. Keeping a private side account, he advanced himself from the alderman’s coffers a half-dozen years’ allowance, about fifteen thousand livres, vowing, to himself of course, to repay it at the first opportunity. That opportunity would be his appointment to a prime position in Monsieur’s royal household, which would be established upon the prince’s marriage.

That time had come, and Monsieur’s household was being

assembled. A good position in the household of a Prince of the Blood, when backed by the recommendation of a close friend like the Comte de Guiche, would be worth at least twelve thousand livres a year, which Malicorne, with his fiscal practices, could easily increase to twenty thousand. Then, with an office and title, Malicorne would marry Mademoiselle de Montalais, a lady of the petty nobility, which would thus ennoble Malicorne. However, for Mademoiselle de Montalais to have a proper dowry, because though she was an only child her family fortune wasn't much to speak of, she herself would have to be placed in the household of a grand princess, as generous as that of the Dowager Madame was frugal. And to make sure that the wife and the husband were in allied households, because to be in opposing houses would be a serious inconvenience, Malicorne had decided that both should be associated with the house of Monsieur, the king's brother. So, Mademoiselle de Montalais would be

maid of honor to the young Madame, just as Monsieur Malicorne would become an officer of Monsieur.

Here was a plan clearly devised and boldly executed.

Malicorne had therefore asked Manicamp to obtain a maid of honor appointment from the Comte de Guiche. And the Comte de Guiche had asked for such an appointment from Monsieur, who had signed the letter without hesitation.

Malicorne's long-term plan—for a mind as active as his must see far into the future—was this: to place near Madame Henrietta a woman devoted to him, a lady who was witty, pretty, young, and intriguing, and thereby to learn all the feminine secrets of the princess's household, while he, Malicorne, together with his friend Manicamp, would divine all the masculine mysteries of the young prince's court. And by this means they would rapidly rise in rank and fortune.

Now, Malicorne was an ill-sounding

name, and he who bore it had no illusions on that score, but if he could buy an estate somewhere, he could be Malicorne of some minor domain, or even de Malicorne, which sounded much more noble. It might even be possible to discover an overlooked aristocratic heritage for the name of Malicorne: mightn't there be a provincial domain where an ancient bull with deadly horns had caused some great misfortune and baptized the ground with blood?

Of course, the plan did have certain risks, the first of which was Mademoiselle de Montalais herself. Capricious, changeable, evasive, free-spirited one moment and prudish the next, *a grape-stained Erigone*, ⁶⁶ she sometimes demolished, with a snap of her fingers or a silvery laugh, an edifice that Malicorne had labored a month to build.

Affection aside, Malicorne was pleased with his progress; but his love for Montalais, which he couldn't help but feel, he nonetheless had the strength to conceal with care,

convinced that if he revealed the true ties that bound him to *this protean female*, 67 the demon would repudiate and mock him. So, he humbled his mistress by disdaining her. Though burning with desire, his demeanor was icy, because he was sure that if he opened his arms to her, she'd just laugh and run away.

For her part, Montalais professed to be irritated by Malicorne, but actually she loved him. Malicorne reflected her indifference back at her until she thought she believed it and felt she must detest him. If she tried to tempt him back by coquetry, Malicorne played even more hard to get than she did.

What made Montalais come back to Malicorne time and again was that he always arrived with fresh news of Court and the city, bringing to Blois a new fashion, scent, or secret, while never asking for anything in return, burning for favors though he was. For her part, Montalais repaid him with what stories she could. Through her, Malicorne knew all the gossip of the

Dowager Madame's household, stories he slyly recounted until Manicamp nearly died laughing, before passing them on to de Guiche, who told them in turn to Monsieur.

And that, in short, was the plot that united the petty intrigues of Blois to Orléans and Orléans to Paris, and which would draw to the latter city, where she would cause such a commotion, our poor little La Vallière, who was far from suspecting what her future held as she went joyfully home on her mother's arm.

As for the worthy Malicorne, by which we mean the father, the alderman of Orléans, he saw the future no more clearly than the others, and never suspected, as he took his after-dinner walk from three o'clock to five around the Place Sainte-Catherine, wearing his gray cloak and beribbioned shoes in the fashion of the time of Louis XIII, that it was he who was paying for all the stolen kisses, whispered secrets, and little surprise gifts that would lay a ribbon of love for forty-five leagues

from the Château de Blois to the
Palais Royal.

XXX

Manicamp and Malicorne

T find his friend Manicamp, who was in temporary seclusion in the city of Orleans. He arrived just as the young nobleman was preparing to sell off the last of his fine clothing. A fortnight before, he'd extracted a hundred pistoles from the Comte de Guiche on the pretext that he had to make a proper appearance when Madame

Henrietta arrived at Le Havre. Three days earlier, he'd received fifty pistoles from Malicorne as the price of Montalais's appointment. But having depleted all his resources, he had no expectations of further income unless he sold his handsome suit of organdy and satin, embroidered and laced with gold, an ensemble that had been admired by all the Court. However, to sell this outfit, the last in his wardrobe, Manicamp had been forced to don his sleepwear and take to his bed.

No fire in his hearth, no money in his pocket, no funds for a promenade, he had nothing but sleep to take the place of food, friends, and fêtes. As the saying goes, "He who sleeps, eats," but no one says, "He who sleeps, converses," or "He who sleeps, revels." Manicamp, who for a week had been forced to give up dancing and playing cards, was therefore in a sad way. He was expecting a moneylender when instead Malicorne came in, and a cry of dismay escaped him. "What now?" he said in a tone of suffering and

despair. "You, again, cher ami?"

"That's a fine reception," said Malicorne.

"It is, if you only knew the reason. I was expecting someone with money, but instead of money, I got you."

"And what if I brought you some money?"

"Well! That's another thing entirely. Be welcome, dear friend." And he extended his hand, not to take that of Malicorne, but for his purse. Malicorne pretended to misunderstand and gave him his hand instead.

"What about the money?" said Manicamp.

"My dear friend, if you want that, you'll have to earn it."

"What must I do?"

"Work for it, by God!"

"Work? How so?"

“I warn you, it’s going to be rough.”

“The devil!”

“You must get out of bed right away and go see the Comte de Guiche.”

“Me, get up?” said Manicamp, stretching luxuriously under the covers. “Not a chance.”

“So, you’ve sold all your clothes?”

“No, I have one outfit left, the finest of all, but I’m waiting for a buyer.”

“And shoes?”

“I think you can see a pair on that chair.”

“Well! Since you still have breeches and a doublet, put your legs in the one and your torso in the other, have them saddle a horse and take to the road.”

“I think not.”

“Why’s that?”

“Morbleu! Don’t you know Monsieur de Guiche is at Étampes?”

“No, I thought he was in Paris, so this is better: you have to go only fifteen leagues instead of thirty.”

“How charming you are! But if I ride fifteen leagues in my best outfit it will be ruined, and instead of selling it for thirty pistoles, I’ll be lucky to get fifteen for it.”

“Do whatever you have to, because I must have a second appointment for a maid of honor.”

“Really? Who for? Is La Montalais twins?”

“Reprobate! You must be twins, the way you squander two fortunes, mine and that of the Comte de Guiche.”

“You should say that of the Comte de Guiche and yours.”

“Quite so—all preference and deference to the lords. But let’s return to my appointment.”

“A waste of time.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Mon ami, Madame can have no more than twelve maids of honor, and there are already twelve hundred women vying for those positions. Why, just to get one I had to deploy all my diplomacy....”

“Yes, I know you’ve made heroic efforts, my friend.”

“We do know our business,” said Manicamp.

“Oh, clearly! When I’m king, I promise you a great favor.”

“What? To allow me to address you as Malicorne the First?”

“No, to be my superintendent of finance—but we’re not at that point yet.”

“Sadly.”

“Which is why you need to get me a second maid of honor appointment.”

“My friend, you can promise me

heaven and earth later, but right now I'm staying put."

Malicorne jingled his purse. "I've got twenty pistoles here," he said.

"Mon Dieu! And what do you think you can get for twenty pistoles?"

"I think I could add them to the five hundred you owe me already," said Malicorne, a bit tartly.

"True enough," replied Manicamp, once more extending his hand. "And on that basis, I think I could accept them. Hand it over."

"Not so fast, devil take you! There's more to it than that. If I give you these twenty pistoles, will I get my appointment?"

"No doubt about it."

"Soon?"

"Today."

"Oh ho! Don't overpromise, Monsieur de Manicamp, I'm not that demanding! Riding thirty leagues in a

day is too much, you'll kill yourself."

"In the service of a friend, I can do the impossible."

"You're a true hero."

"So, then, the twenty pistoles?"

"Here they are," said Malicorne, holding them out.

"Good."

"But, my dear Monsieur de Manicamp, you're going to spend the whole sum on *post horses*." 68

"Not at all; don't worry about a thing."

"Excuse me, but it's fifteen leagues from here to Étampes...."

"Fourteen."

"Even so, fourteen leagues means seven posts. At twenty sous per post, that's seven livres, plus the postilion fee makes fourteen, twice that for the return makes twenty-eight, with food and lodging at least that much again; that's sixty livres all told."

Manicamp coiled like a serpent in his bed and looked with two heavy eyes at Malicorne. "You're right," he said, "I wouldn't be back before tomorrow." And he took the twenty pistoles.

"But now you have to go."

"Since I couldn't possibly get back before tomorrow, we have plenty of time."

"Plenty of time for what?"

"A card game."

"A card game? For what stakes?"

"For your twenty pistoles, by God!"

"No, thanks—you always win."

"How about a little wager, then?"

"For how much?"

"Twenty more pistoles."

"And what's the wager about?"

"This: you said it's fourteen leagues to Étampes."

“So it is.”

“And fourteen leagues back again.”

“Yes.”

“A total of twenty-eight leagues.”

“Quite so.”

“To cover these twenty-eight leagues, you’ll grant me fourteen hours?”

“I would.”

“Plus, an hour to find the Comte de Guiche?”

“Fine.”

“And an hour to get him to write the letter to Monsieur?”

“Very well.”

“Sixteen hours in total.”

“You calculate like Colbert.”

“It’s noon now?”

“Half past.”

“My! That’s a fine watch you have.”

Malicorne hastily returned his watch to its pocket. “And so?”

“And so! I’ll wager the twenty pistoles you loaned me against another twenty that you’ll have the Comte de Guiche’s letter in....”

“In how long?”

“In just eight hours.”

“Do you have a flying horse?”

“I might. Are you on?”

“I’ll have the count’s letter in eight hours?”

“Yes.”

“Signed?”

“Yes.”

“In my hand?”

“In your hand.”

“All right, I’ll take that bet!” said Malicorne, curious to see how this tailor’s-dummy would manage it.

“You’re on?”

“I’m on.”

“Pass me that pen, ink, and paper.”

“Here you go.”

“Ah!” With a sigh, Manicamp half-raised himself onto his left arm, and then with beautiful penmanship traced the following lines: Good for one appointment of a maid of honor to Madame, which Monsieur le Comte de Guiche will take care to obtain at the first opportunity. De Manicamp. This exhausting task accomplished, Manicamp burrowed back into his bed.

“Well?” asked Malicorne. “What does this mean?”

“It means that if you’re really in a hurry to get your letter for Monsieur from the Comte de Guiche, then I’ve won my wager.”

“How so?”

“It’s pretty clear, it seems to me. You take this note.”

“All right.”

“And you go in my place.”

“Ohh.”

“You gallop hell for leather.”

“I see.”

“In six hours, you’re in Étampes, by seven o’clock you have your letter from the count, and I’ve won my bet without ever leaving my bed, which suits me perfectly—and you too, for that matter.”

“Manicamp, I salute you; you’re a great man.”

“I suppose so.”

“I leave, then, for Étampes.”

“Indeed.”

“Once there, I present the Comte de Guiche with this note.”

“And he’ll give you one like it for Monsieur.”

“Then I ride for Paris.”

“Where you’ll find Monsieur and give him the note from the Comte de Guiche.”

“Monsieur will approve the request.”

“Instantly.”

“And I’ll have my appointment.”

“So you shall.”

“Ah!”

“I hope my behavior has been proper in this?”

“Adorably proper!”

“Merci.”

“You get from the Comte de Guiche pretty much anything you want, eh, my dear Manicamp?”

“Anything! Except money.”

“The devil! That is an unfortunate exception. But suppose, instead of money, you asked for....”

“What?”

“Something really important.”

“And what do you call important?”

“Well, suppose one of your friends asked you for a favor?”

“I wouldn’t do it.”

“How selfish!”

“Not, that is, until I found out what I’d get in return.”

“Now we’re talking. The friend of which I speak is in front of you.”

“You, Malicorne?”

“Me.”

“Ah ça! Are you so wealthy, then?”

“If you call fifty pistoles wealth.”

“Fifty pistoles is just the amount I need. Where are they?”

“Right here,” said Malicorne, patting his money belt.

“Then tell me, mon cher, what it is you need.”

Malicorne took up the pen, ink, and paper, and presented them to Manicamp. "Write," he said.

"Dictate."

"Good for one appointment to an office in Monsieur's household."

"Oh ho!" said Manicamp, putting down the plume. "An office in Monsieur's household—for a mere fifty pistoles?"

"Perhaps I misspoke."

"What did you mean to say?"

"I meant to say five hundred."

"And this five hundred?"

"Here they are." And he took five rolls of coins from his money belt.

Manicamp devoured the rolls of coins with his eyes—but this time, Malicorne held them at a distance. "So, what do you say? Five hundred pistoles...." Malicorne clinked them in his hand.

"I say it's a bargain, mon cher,"

said Manicamp as he took up the pen, “though you’re going to exhaust my credit. However, dictate.”

Malicorne continued, “Which my friend the Comte de Guiche will obtain from Monsieur for my friend Malicorne.”

“It’s done,” said Manicamp.

“Pardon me, but you forgot to sign it.”

“Why, so I did! ...Er, the five hundred pistoles?”

“Here are two hundred and fifty.”

“And the other two hundred and fifty?”

“When I get my appointment.”

Manicamp made a face. “In that case, give me back the note.”

“To do what?”

“So I can add a word to it.”

“A word?”

“Yes, a single word.”

“Which is?”

“Quickly.”

Malicorne gave him the note, Manicamp added the word and signed.

“Good!” said Malicorne, taking the paper.

Manicamp was counting the pistoles. “It’s twenty short,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s short the twenty that I won.”

“When?”

“When I wagered that you’d have the letter from the Comte de Guiche in eight hours.”

“That’s only fair.” And Malicorne gave him twenty more pistoles.

Manicamp gathered the gold in both hands and let it rain down on his bed.

“The second maid of honor appointment,” said Malicorne to himself, blowing the note dry, “seems, at first blush, to cost me more than the first, but....”

He paused, took up the pen and a fresh sheet, and wrote to Montalais:

Mademoiselle, tell your friend that her appointment won't be long in coming. I'm off to get it signed personally, riding eighty-six leagues for love of you....

Then, with his devilish smile, he resumed his internal monologue: “An appointment that, at first blush, seems to cost more than the first, but I think it will be worth it, for if Mademoiselle de La Vallière isn't an even better investment than Mademoiselle de Montalais—well, my name isn't Malicorne!”

Then, aloud, he said, “Goodbye, Manicamp,” bowed, and took his leave.

XXXI

The
Courtyard of
the *H*ôtel de
Grammont

W

arrived at Étampes, he found that the Comte de Guiche had departed for Paris. Malicorne took two hours to rest and then continued on his way. It was night by the time he arrived in Paris, so he went to a little inn where he

always stayed on his visits to the capital, and at eight o'clock the next morning he presented himself at the *Hôtel de Grammont*. 69

Malicorne arrived just in time, for the Comte de Guiche was preparing to bid farewell to Monsieur before departing for Le Havre, where the elite of the French nobility were gathering to greet Madame on her arrival from England. Malicorne dropped Manicamp's name and was admitted instantly. The Comte de Guiche was in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Grammont inspecting his carriage and horses, which his equerries were passing in review before him. The count was doling out praise and blame regarding the horses, their caparisons and tack, when this important activity was interrupted by the name of Manicamp. "Manicamp?" he cried. "Send him in, parbleu! Send him in!" And he turned and walked toward the gate.

Malicorne slid in through the half-open gate, causing the Comte de

Guiche to stop in surprise at the sight of an unknown face in place of the one he expected. "Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte," Malicorne said, "but there's been a slight mistake. I'm not Manicamp, I'm just his envoy."

"Ah!" said de Guiche a bit coldly. "And you bring me...?"

"A letter, Monsieur le Comte." Malicorne presented the first note while carefully observing the count's expression.

De Guiche read the note and laughed. "What?" he said. "Another maid of honor? Ah ça! Is this madcap Manicamp the sponsor of every hopeful maiden in France?"

Malicorne just bowed.

"And why doesn't he come himself?" the count asked.

"He's ... in bed."

"The devil you say! Is he out of cash?" De Guiche shrugged and shook his head. "What does he do

with all of his money?”

Malicorne answered with a shrug that implied that on this matter he was as ignorant as the count.

De Guiche continued, “Why doesn’t he just use his credit?”

“I might have an idea about that.”

“Which is?”

“That Manicamp has no credit with anyone but you, Monsieur le Comte.”

“Then he won’t be coming to Le Havre?”

Another shrug of ignorance from Malicorne.

“But that’s impossible. Everyone will be there!”

“I would hope, Monsieur le Comte, that he wouldn’t pass up such an opportunity.”

“He should be in Paris already.”

“He might be able to cut across to make up the lost time.”

“Where is he now?”

“At Orléans.”

“Hmm. Monsieur,” de Guiche said with a bow, “you appear to me to be a man of good taste.”

Malicorne was wearing one of Manicamp’s old outfits. He bowed in his turn, and said, “You honor me, Monsieur.”

“With whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?”

“My name is Malicorne, Monsieur.”

“Monsieur de Malicorne, give me your opinion: what do you think of these saddle holsters?”

Malicorne was a man of quick wits and understood what was called for. Besides, the de placed before his name raised him to a rank equal to the nobleman speaking to him. Looking over the holsters like a connoisseur, he said without hesitation, “They’re a trifle heavy, Monsieur.”

“You see?” said de Guiche to the saddler. “Monsieur, who is a man of taste, finds the holsters a trifle heavy. Isn’t that what I just told you?”

The saddler apologized.

“And this horse, what do you think?” asked de Guiche. “I’ve just purchased it.”

“At first glance, it seems perfectly fine, Monsieur le Comte, but I couldn’t really say without riding it.”

“Well! Mount up, Monsieur de Malicorne, and take two or three turns around the yard.”

In fact, the courtyard of the hôtel had been set up like a riding ring. Malicorne, showing no embarrassment, took hold of the reins and bridle, gripped the mane with his left hand, placed his foot in the stirrup, and vaulted into the saddle.

The first time around the yard he took the horse at a walk, the second time at the trot, and the third time

around at the gallop. Then he stopped near the count, dismounted, and tossed the reins to a groom.

“Well!” said the count. “What do you think, Monsieur de Malicorne?”

“Monsieur le Comte,” said Malicorne, “this horse is of the Mecklenburg breed. In checking how the bit rode in his mouth, I could see that he was rising seven, just the age at which a horse should be trained for war. The forehead is light; a horse that holds its head up, as they say, never tires the rider’s hand. Its withers are a bit low; the droop of the rump almost makes me doubt the purity of its German blood. I think it might have a touch of English in it. The animal stands well, but trots a trifle high, and might cut itself; keep an eye on its shoes. Overall, though, it’s quite manageable, and quick and easy in changing its gait.”

“Well judged, Monsieur de Malicorne,” said the count. “You’re a connoisseur.” Then, looking over the newcomer, he said, “You have a

charming outfit. You didn't get that in the provinces, I imagine; they don't tailor clothes that way in Tours or Orléans."

"No, Monsieur le Comte, this suit was made in Paris."

"Yes, and it shows ... but back to business. Manicamp wants a second appointment for a maid of honor?"

"You saw what he wrote, Monsieur le Comte."

"Who was the first one, again?"

Malicorne colored slightly. "A charming maiden," he answered hastily, "Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah! You know her, Monsieur?"

"Yes, she's my fiancée, or nearly so."

"Well, that's something. A thousand compliments!" said de Guiche, suppressing the bawdy jest that was on his lips before Malicorne naming Montalais as his fiancée reminded him to be respectful.

“And the second appointment, who’s that for?” asked de Guiche. “Is it for Manicamp’s fiancée? If so, I’m sorry for her, poor girl! She’ll have a dreadful husband.”

“No, Monsieur le Comte, the second appointment is for Mademoiselle La Baume Le Blanc de La Vallière.”

“Never heard of her,” said de Guiche.

“You will, Monsieur,” said Malicorne, smiling in his turn.

“Fine! I’ll speak of it to Monsieur. By the way, is she well born?”

“She’s of a very good house and is maid of honor to the Dowager Madame.”

“Excellent! Will you go with me to see Monsieur?”

“Gladly, if you’ll do me the honor.”

“Do you have a carriage?”

“No, I came on horseback.”

“In that outfit?”

“No, Monsieur, I came from Orléans by post horse and changed my riding clothes before presenting myself to you.”

“Oh, right, you said you’d come from Orléans.” And he stuffed the letter from Manicamp into his pocket.

“Monsieur,” said Malicorne timidly, “I think you didn’t read everything.”

“What do you mean?”

“There were two notes in that envelope.”

“Ah! Are you sure?”

“Quite sure!”

“Let’s take a look.” And the count reopened the seal. “My faith, you’re right,” he said, unfolding the note he hadn’t read yet. “As I thought,” he said, “another request for an appointment in Monsieur’s household. What a bottomless pit Manicamp is! Is he selling these now?”

“No, Monsieur le Comte, he wants to make a gift of it.”

“To whom?”

“To me, Monsieur.”

“But why didn’t you say so right away, my dear Monsieur de Mauvaisecorne?”

“Malicorne!”

“Ah, pardon me! These Latin names always trip me up. Why do they teach it to us when it only leads to confusion? Mala, mauvaise, it’s all one to me. You’ll forgive me, won’t you, Monsieur de Malicorne?”

“Your kindness moves me, Monsieur, and I feel there’s something else I should tell you.”

“What’s that, Monsieur?”

“That I’m not a gentleman; I have a good heart and a fair amount of brains, but my name is just plain Malicorne.”

“Well!” said de Guiche, smiling at

the sly features of his companion.
“You seem like a pleasant enough fellow to me. I like your face, Monsieur Malicorne, and you must have more than a few good qualities if you please that snob Manicamp. In fact, you must be a very saint come to Earth.”

“Why’s that?”

“Morableu! Because he’s willing to give you something for nothing. Didn’t you say he wanted to get you an appointment to the royal household?”

“Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte, but if I obtain this appointment, it’ll be thanks to you, not him.”

“And then won’t he have gotten it for you for nothing?”

“Ah, Monsieur le Comte....”

“Wait a moment, isn’t there a Malicorne in Orléans? One who lends money to Monsieur le Prince?”

“I think you mean my father, Monsieur.”

“Ah, just so! Monsieur le Prince has the father, and that bottomless pit Manicamp has the son. Take care, Monsieur, I know him, and God’s death, he’ll pick you clean to your bones!”

“Except I lend money without interest, Monsieur,” said Malicorne, smiling.

“Ha! I said you were a saint, or something like it, Monsieur Malicorne. You’ll have your appointment, or my name isn’t de Guiche.”

“Oh, Monsieur le Comte, I’ll be forever in your debt!” said Malicorne with delight.

“Come along, let’s go see the prince, my dear Monsieur Malicorne.” And de Guiche started toward the gate, beckoning Malicorne to follow him.

But as they were about to cross the threshold, a young man appeared on the other side. He was a cavalier of age twenty-four or twenty-five, with a

pale face, thin lips, bright eyes, and brown hair and eyebrows. “Well, hello!” he said, pushing his way through the gate.

“Ah! It’s you, de Wardes.* Booted, spurred, and with whip in hand!”

“The proper dress for a man about to ride to Le Havre. By tomorrow, no one will be left in Paris.” And the newcomer bowed politely to Malicorne, whose outfit was of almost princely quality.

“Monsieur Malicorne,” said de Guiche to his friend.

De Wardes bowed again.

“Monsieur de Wardes,” said de Guiche to Malicorne.

Malicorne bowed in his turn.

“Come, de Wardes,” continued de Guiche, “you’re always in the know on these things—what offices are still available in the court, or rather the household of Monsieur?”

“In Monsieur’s household?” said

de Wardes, gazing up as if searching his memory. "Let's see ... that of grand equerry, I think."

"Oh!" said Malicorne. "Such a post is entirely too high, Monsieur. I'm not nearly so ambitious."

De Wardes had a sharper eye than de Guiche and sized up Malicorne in an instant. "In fact," he said, "to occupy that post, you'd have to be a duke and peer."

"All I ask," said Malicorne, "is a very humble position. I'm not a great man and seek nothing beyond my rank."

"Monsieur Malicorne, here," said de Guiche to de Wardes, "is a charming fellow whose only misfortune is in not being born a gentleman. But, as you know, I care more about the man than I do about his birth."

"Of course," said de Wardes, "but I have to point out, my dear Count, that, without noble birth, it's not reasonable to hope to enter

Monsieur's household."

"That's true," said the count. "Etiquette is so formal. Devil take it! We hadn't thought about that."

"Alas! That's quite a blow for me," said Malicorne, paling slightly. "Quite a blow, Monsieur le Comte."

"But I'm sure we can find a remedy," replied de Guiche.

"Pardieu!" cried de Wardes. "That remedy is easily found—he can just be made into a gentleman! His Eminence Cardinal Mazarini did nothing else from morning till night."

"Oh, hush, de Wardes!" said the count. "That's not funny, and you should know better than to make such a joke. Yes, a title can be bought, but it's bad enough for us in the noblesse that it's true without joking about it."

"My faith! You've become as stiff as a Puritan, like one of those English."

"Monsieur le Vicomte de

Bragelonne,” announced a valet at the courtyard gate, as if at the entrance to a salon.

“Ah, dear Raoul! Welcome! Look at you, all booted and spurred. Ready to go?”

Bragelonne approached the group of young men and bowed with that grave but gracious air that was unique to him. His greeting was directed especially toward de Wardes, whom he didn’t know, and whose expression had turned cold at the appearance of Raoul. “My friend,” he said to de Guiche, “I come to ask to join your company. You leave soon for Le Havre, I presume?”

“Yes, that’s great! Charming! We’ll have a delightful journey. Monsieur Malicorne, this is Monsieur de Bragelonne. And allow me to present Monsieur de Wardes.”

The young men exchanged formal bows. Their natures seemed opposed from the moment they met: de Wardes was smooth, facile, and insincere, while Raoul was serious,

well-meaning, and forthright.

“Raoul,” said de Guiche, “help decide this outstanding issue between de Wardes and me.”

“What issue is that?”

“A matter of noblesse.”

“Who would know better than a Grammont?”

“I’m not asking for compliments, I’m asking for your opinion.”

“Then explain to me the matter under discussion.”

“De Wardes claims that the award of noble titles has been abused; I claim that the man is more important than the title.”

“And you have the right of it,” said Bragelonne quietly.

“But I, Monsieur le Vicomte,” replied de Wardes stubbornly, “claim that I have the right of it.”

“Your rationale, Monsieur?”

“My rationale is the fact that everything in France nowadays conspires to humiliate our noblemen.”

“Where do you see that?” asked Raoul.

“I see it in the king himself. He surrounds himself with ‘gentlemen’ who don’t have four quarters of nobility.”

“Come, now!” said de Guiche. “I don’t know how the devil you can say that.”

“One example is enough.” And de Wardes looked directly at Bragelonne.

“Say on.”

“Do you know who has just been named Captain-Lieutenant of the Musketeers, a position worth more than a peerage, a title that takes precedence over all the Marshals of France?”

Raoul began to flush, for he saw where de Wardes was going.

“No,” said de Guiche. “Who is it? It

must have just happened, as that position was vacant as recently as last week. I know because the king refused it to Monsieur, who wanted it for one of his protégés.”

“Well, mon cher! The king, who refused it to the protégé of Monsieur, gave it to the Chevalier d’Artagnan, a younger son from Gascony who’s dragged his sword through the antechambers for thirty years.”

“Pardon me, Monsieur, if I interrupt,” said Raoul, with a sharp look at de Wardes, “but you speak like a man who doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

“I, not know Monsieur d’Artagnan! Mon Dieu! Who doesn’t know him?”

“Those who know him, Monsieur,” replied Raoul, calmly and coldly, “are bound to say that, if he isn’t as good a gentleman as the king, which isn’t his fault, he equals every king in the world in courage and loyalty. That’s my opinion, Monsieur, because I’ve known Monsieur d’Artagnan, thank God, since I was born.”

De Wardes drew breath to reply,
but de Guiche stopped him.

XXXII

The Portrait of Madame

Ttaking a nasty turn, as de Guiche could clearly see. The look in Bragelonne's eye was hostile, while de Wardes's expression seemed calculated to offend. Without understanding what was behind the emotions agitating his two friends, de Guiche thought it best to parry the blow he sensed coming from one or

perhaps both of them. "Messieurs," he said, "the household must continue preparing to leave, but also I must go see Monsieur. Let's manage it this way: you, de Wardes, can come with me to the Palais Royal, while you, Raoul, stay here and manage my retainers; make sure they do what you say and take a final look over all the preparations for departure."

Raoul, calm as a man who neither seeks nor avoids a conflict, nodded as a sign of assent, and took a seat on a bench in the sunlight.

"Perfect," said de Guiche. "Stay there, Raoul, and have a look at those two horses I just bought; let me know what you think, because I took them only on condition that you ratified the purchase. Oh, but excuse me, I forgot to ask for news of the Comte de La Fère!"

As he spoke these final words, he glanced at de Wardes to see what effect the name of Raoul's father would have on him.

"Thank you," replied Bragelonne,

“the count is well.”

A gleam of hatred flashed from de Wardes's eyes. De Guiche pretended not to notice this flicker of fury and instead shook hands with Raoul, saying, “Bragelonne, you'll catch up with us in the Palais Royal courtyard, won't you?”

Then, beckoning de Wardes, who was swaying agitatedly from one foot to the other, to follow him, he said, “We're off. Come along, Monsieur Malicorne.”

This name made Raoul start. He had a feeling he'd heard that name before but couldn't remember when.

While he was blinking, distracted by the half-memory, the other three young men left to head for the Palais Royal, where Monsieur was staying. Malicorne was thinking that it seemed the count's two friends had something to settle between them, but also that he needed to remember his rank. He walked behind the young noblemen.

“Are you mad?” said de Guiche to his companion, once they’d left the Hôtel de Grammont. “Attacking Monsieur d’Artagnan, and in front of Raoul!”

“Well? What of it?” said de Wardes.

“What do you mean, what of it?”

“Is attacking Monsieur d’Artagnan forbidden?”

“But you must know that Monsieur d’Artagnan is one of that famous quartet they called the Four Musketeers.”

“Of course, but I don’t see why that should stop me from hating Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

“What did he do to you?”

“To me? Nothing.”

“Then, why hate him?”

“Ask the ghost of my father that.”

“Really, de Wardes? Monsieur d’Artagnan isn’t the kind of man to

leave unfinished business behind him. Your father carried on affairs in a high-handed manner, or so I've heard, but there are no insults that can't be washed away by the honorable blood shed with a few sword strokes."

"What would you have, cher ami? This hatred between my father and Monsieur d'Artagnan was real; when I was very young, he told me the reason for it, and I regard its legacy as part of my heritage."

"And this hatred was solely for Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"Oh, d'Artagnan was so closely associated with his three comrades that there's hatred enough for all. They'll have no need to complain about any shortage."

De Guiche was watching de Wardes closely and shuddered when he saw the young man's pale smile. Something like a premonition darkened his thoughts, and though he told himself that the time had passed when gentlemen settled their

differences with swords, such heartfelt hatred, with no means of release, could only fester. Such a smile could be as threatening as a word—and then after the fathers, who had hated with their hearts and fought with their arms, would come the sons, who might hate as deeply but instead fight with intrigue and deceit. And as it wasn't Raoul whom he suspected of intrigue and deceit, it was for him that de Guiche shuddered.

But while these dark thoughts passed behind de Guiche's brow, de Wardes had regained control of himself. "Anyway," he said, "I have nothing personal against Monsieur de Bragelonne; I don't even know him."

"In any case, de Wardes, remember this," said de Guiche a bit sharply. "Raoul is one of my closest friends."

De Wardes just bowed.

The matter ended there, for though de Guiche tried to get him to say what he really felt, de Wardes

seemed resolved to let it pass and remained impenetrable. De Guiche told himself he'd just have to get the full story from Raoul.

Meanwhile, they arrived at the Palais Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of curious citizens. Monsieur's retainers were already on horseback, awaiting his orders to escort the ambassadors charged with bringing back the young princess. The spectacle of the household's magnificent horses, equipment, and livery, along with their respectful attachment to royalty, had to be enough to compensate the onlookers for this enormous expense their taxes supported.

Mazarin had said, "Let them sing their angry songs, so long as they pay." Louis XIV just said, "Let them look." Vision had replaced the voice; they could look all they wanted, but they no longer sang.

Monsieur de Guiche left de Wardes and Malicorne at the foot of the grand stairway while he went straight

up to Monsieur's rooms, a privilege he shared with the Chevalier de Lorraine,* Monsieur's other favorite. He found the young prince putting on rouge and admiring himself. In the corner of the boudoir, stretched out on a pile of cushions, was Monsieur le Chevalier de Lorraine, who had curled his long blond hair and now toyed with it as a woman would. He smiled at de Guiche, though he couldn't stand him.

The prince turned at the sound of his entrance, saw the count, and said, "Ah, it's you, de Guiche! Come here and tell me the truth."

"Of course, Monseigneur. As you know, that's my greatest fault."

"De Guiche, you can scarcely believe how this wicked chevalier wounds me."

The chevalier shrugged.

"Wounds you?" asked de Guiche. "That seems out of character for the chevalier."

“Well!” continued the prince. “He claims that Mademoiselle Henrietta is better looking as a woman than I am as a man.”

“Take care, Monseigneur,” said de Guiche with a frown. “You asked me to tell the truth.”

“I did,” said Monsieur, almost trembling.

“Very well! In that case, I’ll tell you.”

“No rush, de Guiche,” cried the prince. “Take your time. Look me over carefully and then recall our young Madame; if it will help, here’s her portrait.” And he handed him a miniature, exquisitely detailed.

De Guiche took the portrait and considered it at length. “My faith, Monseigneur, but here’s an adorable face,” he said.

“But consider me as well—consider me!” cried the prince, trying to attract the count’s attention.

“Really, it’s quite wonderful,”

murmured de Guiche, absorbed by the portrait

“Ohé, Monsieur,” huffed the prince. “It’s almost as if you’d never seen the girl before.”

“I have seen her, Monseigneur, yes, but not for five years, and a lot can change between a girl of age twelve and a young woman of seventeen.”

“Enough, let’s have your opinion. Come, speak!”

“My opinion is that this is a very flattering portrait, Monseigneur.”

“Well, of course it is!” said the prince, triumphant. “Of course it is. But if one supposes that it isn’t flattering, then what do you think?”

“I think, Monseigneur, that Your Highness is blessed with a charming fiancée.”

“Fine, I get your opinion of her—but what about me?”

“My opinion, Monseigneur, is that

you're far too good-looking for a man."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing. Monsieur found the Comte de Guiche's opinion less than flattering and pouted. "I have the meanest friends," he said.

De Guiche looked once more at the portrait, and then after several seconds returned it with visible reluctance to Monsieur, saying, "Decidedly, Monseigneur, instead of one more look at Madame, I'd rather look at Your Highness ten times over."

The chevalier must have heard something in these words that the prince didn't, for he said, "Maybe you're the one who should be getting married!"

Monsieur continued applying his rouge, and when he was done, he glanced again at the portrait and then at his face in the glass. He seemed satisfied with the comparison. "Anyway, it was kind of you to come," he said to de Guiche. "I was afraid

you'd leave without saying goodbye to me."

"Monseigneur knows me too well to think I'd ever do anything like that."

"I imagine you have something to ask of me before leaving Paris."

"Why, Your Highness has guessed right! I do, in fact, have a request to present to him."

"Fine! Present it."

The Chevalier de Lorraine was suddenly all eyes and ears; for the chevalier, every favor granted to others was something stolen from him.

As de Guiche hesitated, the prince asked, "Is it for money? That would be well timed, for I'm simply rolling in it—the Surintendant des Finances gave me fifty thousand pistoles."

"Thank you, Your Highness, but it isn't for money."

"What, then? Let's hear it."

“An appointment for a maid of honor.”

“Tudieu! De Guiche, you’re practically a schoolmaster,” said the prince with disdain. “Will you ever speak to me of anyone but silly girls?”

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled, for he knew well that Monsieur cared little for ladies.

“Monseigneur,” said the count, “I’m not the sponsor of the person for whom I ask, it’s a friend of mine.”

“Ah, that’s different! And what’s the name of your friend’s protégée?”

“Mademoiselle de La Baume Le Blanc de La Vallière, currently maid of honor to the Dowager Madame.”

“Fie! *She’s a cripple,*” 70 said the Chevalier de Lorraine from his nest of cushions.

“A cripple!” repeated the prince. “Should my wife Madame have that before her eyes? Faith, no, it would endanger her pregnancies.”

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing. "Monsieur le Chevalier," said de Guiche, "your remarks are ungenerous; I ask an honest favor and you do your best to confound it."

"Oh, pardon me, Monsieur le Comte!" said Lorraine, alarmed by the edge in the count's voice. "That wasn't my intention, and now that I think about it, I must have mistaken that demoiselle for someone else."

"In fact, I believe you were mistaken."

"Come, is this important to you, de Guiche?" asked the prince.

"Very, Monseigneur."

"Well, then, I agree! But no more appointments, the household is full."

"Look!" cried the chevalier. "It's noon already, the time set for departure."

"Are you rushing me out, Chevalier?" asked de Guiche.

"Oh, Count! How severe you are

with me today," replied the chevalier in mock dismay.

"For God's sake, Count and Chevalier!" said Monsieur. "No bickering! Can't you see how it upsets me?"

"Your signature?" asked de Guiche.

"Take a brevet from the drawer and hand it to me."

De Guiche picked up the appointment with one hand, and with the other presented Monsieur a plume dipped in ink. The prince signed. "Here," he said, returning the brevet, "but it's on one condition."

"What's that?"

"That you make up with the chevalier."

"Gladly," said de Guiche. And he offered his hand to the chevalier with an indifference that was scarcely distinguishable from contempt.

"Off with you, then, Count," said the chevalier without appearing to

notice the count's evident disdain. "Go, and bring us back a princess who won't spend as much time as you in looking at her portrait."

"Yes, go and come back quickly," said the prince. "By the way, who are you taking with you?"

"Bragelonne and de Wardes."

"Two brave cavaliers."

"Entirely too brave," said the chevalier. "Try to bring back both of them, Count."

"Black-hearted villain!" murmured de Guiche. "He smells trouble sooner than anyone."

Then, with a bow to Monsieur, he took his leave.

Coming out under the portico, he waved the signed appointment in the air. Malicorne rushed forward and greeted him, trembling for joy—but de Guiche could see he was hoping for something else as well. "Patience, Monsieur, patience," he said to his new friend. "The Chevalier de

Lorraine was there, and I was afraid he'd upset the cart if I asked for too much. We'll try again when I return. Farewell!"

"Farewell, Monsieur le Comte, and a thousand thanks," said Malicorne.

"And send Manicamp to me. By the way, Monsieur, is it true that Mademoiselle de La Vallière is lame?"

Just as he said these words, a horse pulled up behind him. He turned and saw Bragelonne, pale of face, having just reentered the courtyard. With the quick ears of a lover, he'd overheard de Guiche—unlike Malicorne, who had already moved out of range of his voice. "Why are they talking about Louise?" Raoul said to himself. "Oh! If I hear her name from de Wardes, and if he says it with a smirk...!"

"Come, come, Messieurs!" cried the Comte de Guiche. "Let's get moving."

At that moment the prince, having

finished his makeup, appeared at the window. The whole cortège cheered and waved, and ten minutes later, banners, scarves, and plumes aflutter, the coursers left at the gallop.

XXXIII

Le *H*avre

T brilliant, so gay, so alive with differing desires, arrived at *Le Havre* 71 four days after its departure from Paris. It was about five o'clock in the evening, but there was no news of Madame. Everyone was concerned about finding lodging, and arguments were breaking out between masters and their servants. In the midst of this chaos the Comte de Guiche thought he recognized Manicamp. It was indeed him, but as Malicorne had taken the last of his fine clothes, he was clad in all he had left, an outfit of purple velvet trimmed with silver.

De Guiche recognized him as much from his clothing as from his features. He'd often seen Manicamp in this purple suit, his outfit of last resort. Manicamp presented himself to the count under a wall of torches that flamed on the archway over Le Havre's city gate, the one near the tower of François I. The count, seeing Manicamp's woeful expression, couldn't help but laugh. "Oh, my poor Manicamp. Dressed again in purple! Are you in mourning?"

"I am, indeed, in mourning," Manicamp replied.

"For whom or what?"

"For my fine blue and gold outfit, which has vanished, leaving me only this one, which I still had to pay solid coin to buy back."

"Really?"

"By God! Are you surprised? You, who left me destitute?"

"Well, what matters is that you got here."

“Over execrable roads.”

“Where are you staying?”

“Staying?”

“Yes.”

“I’m not staying anywhere.”

De Guiche laughed. “Then where will you sleep?”

“Wherever you do.”

“I have no idea where that will be.”

“What do you mean, no idea?”

“You heard me; how should I know where I’m staying?”

“Haven’t you rented a hôtel?”

“Who, me?”

“You, or Monsieur.”

“It didn’t occur to either of us. Le Havre is big enough, I suppose, that I should be able to find a decent house in a good neighborhood with stabling for twelve horses.”

“Oh, there are plenty of decent houses.”

“All right, then....”

“Just not for us.”

“What do you mean, not for us? For who, then?”

“For the English, parbleu!”

“For the English?”

“Yes, they’ve rented all of them.”

“Who would do such a thing?”

“Why, Monsieur de Buckingham.”*

“I beg your pardon?” said de Guiche, struck by the name.

“Yes, of course, mon cher, Monsieur de Buckingham! His Grace was preceded by a courier who arrived three days ago and proceeded to rent every available house in town.”

“Come, come, Manicamp, talk sense.”

“Dame! Did I say something that was hard to understand?”

“But, devil take it, Monsieur de Buckingham can’t have rented every house in Le Havre!”

“He hasn’t occupied them yet, true, but once he disembarks, they’re his.”

“But ... but that...!”

“It’s clear you don’t know the English. They don’t like to share.”

“Really, come now! A man who has one house doesn’t need two.”

“But what if there are more men than two?”

“Two, four, six houses, what have you! There must be a hundred houses in Le Havre.”

“Indeed. And they’re all rented.”

“Impossible!”

“How stubborn you are. I tell you Monsieur de Buckingham has rented every house anywhere near those that are to be occupied by Her Majesty the

Dowager Queen of England and the princess her daughter.”

“Well, now. Isn’t that telling?” said de Wardes, stroking his horse’s neck.

“You may well say so, Monsieur.”

“Are you completely sure of all this, Monsieur de Manicamp?” said de Wardes, with a sly glance at de Guiche, as if to question how far they could trust his friend’s reason.

Meanwhile night had fallen, and under the gate’s torches, the pages, lackeys, equerries, horses, and carriages all crowded the gate and the square beyond. The torchlight reflected from the harbor on the water of the rising tide, while along the jetty a thousand curious sailors and citizens stood taking in the spectacle.

During this delay, Bragelonne, as if he had no part in it, sat on his horse a bit behind de Guiche and gazed out at the light playing on the water, enjoying the salt breeze as the waves rolled in on the shore, pebbles and

seaweed tossing in the foam.

“But why,” said de Guiche, “would Monsieur de Buckingham send ahead to rent every lodging?”

“Why, indeed?” asked de Wardes.

“For the best of reasons,” replied Manicamp.

“Do you know what it is?”

“I think I do.”

“Then tell us.”

“Shh. Lean closer.”

“The devil! Can you tell us only in a whisper?”

“You be the judge.”

“Fine.” De Guiche leaned closer.

“L’amour,” said Manicamp.

“I don’t understand.”

“Ah, but you will.”

“Explain yourself.”

“So I shall! It’s sad to say it, Monsieur le Comte, but His Royal Highness Monsieur will be the unhappiest of husbands.”

“What! Are you saying the Duke of Buckingham...?”

“I’m saying *that name brings nothing but sadness to the Royal House of France.*” 72

“So, the duke...?”

“Is madly in love with Madame, or so everyone says, and will allow no one near her but himself.”

De Guiche flushed. “Fine! Now I get it. Thank you,” he said, shaking Manicamp’s hand. Then he added, “But for God’s sake, Manicamp, make sure the Duke of Buckingham’s folly doesn’t spread to French ears, or we’ll see many a sword drawn that doesn’t fear English anger.”

“Don’t blame me! After all, I have no proof of this folly,” said Manicamp. “It’s only what I’ve heard.”

“No,” said de Guiche, “this rings

true.” And he ground his teeth in spite of himself.

“Well, so what? Who cares if Buckingham is to Monsieur what his father was to the late king? Buckingham the father for the queen mother, and Buckingham the son for the young Madame. That’s how it goes.”

“Manicamp! Really!”

“What the devil! It’s the plain truth! ...Or so they say.”

“Enough!” said the count.

“Enough? But why?” said de Wardes. “Such English attention honors the nation of France! Don’t you agree, Monsieur de Bragelonne?”

“Sorry. What?” said Bragelonne, distracted.

“Shouldn’t the English pay homage to the beauty of our princesses and queens?”

“I beg your pardon, please tell me what you’re talking about.”

“It was probably necessary for Monsieur de Buckingham the elder to come to Paris before His Majesty King Louis XIII realized that his wife was one of the most beautiful ladies at the Court of France—and now Monsieur de Buckingham the younger, in his turn, pays homage to the beauty of a princess of French blood. And it appears that loving homage is to come with him over the sea.”

“Monsieur,” replied Bragelonne, “I don’t like hearing jests about these matters. We gentlemen are the guardians of our queens’ and princesses’ honor. If we stoop so low as to mock them, how will the commoners behave?”

“Is that so, Monsieur? Is that so?” snapped de Wardes, coloring to the tips of his ears. “How am I supposed to take that?”

“Take it however you please, Monsieur,” replied Bragelonne coldly.

“Bragelonne! Bragelonne!”
whispered de Guiche.

“Monsieur de Wardes! Really!” cried Manicamp, seeing the young man press his horse toward Raoul’s.

“Messieurs! Messieurs!” said de Guiche. “Don’t be such bad examples here in a public street! De Wardes, you’re in the wrong.”

“Wrong! How so? Tell me.”

“Wrong because you’re always speaking ill of something or someone,” replied Raoul with his implacable coolness.

“Let it go, Raoul,” said de Guiche quietly.

“Yes, let it go. You could scarcely put on an entertaining fight until after you’ve had a rest,” said Manicamp.

“Enough! Come on!” said de Guiche. “Forward, Messieurs, forward!”

And with that, pushing aside horses and servants, he made his way into the square through the middle of the crowd, drawing after him all the French cortège. A large gateway

stood open into a courtyard, and de Guiche rode in, followed by Bragelonne, de Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen.

There they had a kind of council of war, debating how to preserve the dignity of their ambassadorial company. Bragelonne advised them to respect the English rights of priority. De Wardes said they should sack the entire city. This proposal seemed a trifle extreme to Manicamp; he thought they ought to sleep on it first. Unfortunately, two things were lacking before they could follow this advice: housing and beds.

De Guiche considered quietly for a few moments, and then said aloud, "Who loves me, follows me."

"Servants, too?" asked a page who'd approached the group of noblemen.

"Everyone!" cried the fiery young man. "Come, Manicamp, lead us to the house that Her Highness Madame will occupy."

Without knowing what the count had in mind, his friends went with him, followed by their retainers, loudly cheering to applaud whatever unknown project the ardent young man was pursuing.

Meanwhile, the wind from the harbor was picking up, blowing in ever stronger gusts.

XXXIV

On the Sea

T bit quieter, though the gale continued to blow. The sun rose behind a red cloud and carved its bloody rays across the crests of black waves. The lookouts of Le Havre watched impatiently from the tops of the towers, until at about eleven in the morning, one signaled that a ship was approaching under full sail, followed at a distance by two others.

They came on like arrows launched by a mighty archer, but the cross-seas

were so heavy that the speed of their approach was matched by the ships' alarming rolls from starboard to port and back again. Soon the ships' designs and the color of their banners identified them as English. In the lead sailed the ship that bore the princess, flying the flag of the admiralty.

Immediately the rumor spread that the princess was arriving. All the French nobility flocked to the harbor, and the quays and jetties were lined with people.

Two hours later, the vessels following behind had caught up with the flagship, and all three, apparently unwilling to risk the narrow opening of the harbor, had dropped anchor between Le Havre and the headland of La Hève. This maneuver completed, the flagship gave France a twelve-gun salute that was repeated shot for shot from the tower of François I.

At once a hundred boats put to sea, all brilliant with bright bunting

and intended to bear the French gentility out to the anchored vessels. But it was immediately obvious from the way they were tossed about while still in the harbor that, if they ventured beyond the jetty, where the waves rose like mountains and crashed, roaring, on the shore, none of those boats would make it even a quarter of the way to the ships without capsizing.

Only one boat, that of the harbor pilot, seemed determined, despite the wind and waves, to try to reach the English flagship. De Guiche, who'd been assessing the boats in the harbor to try to pick out the hardiest and most likely to reach the English ships, had spotted the harbor pilot preparing to set off. "Raoul," he said, "don't you think it's shameful for creatures as intelligent and brave as we to be daunted by the brute force of the wind and waves?"

"That's just what I was telling myself," Bragelonne replied.

"Well! What say we board the

harbor pilot's boat and take our chances? How about you, de Wardes?"

"Take care or you'll drown yourselves," said Manicamp.

"And all for nothing," said de Wardes, "because with the wind like this, you've no chance of making it out to the ships."

"So, you refuse?"

"Yes, by God! I'm happy to risk my life in a fight with other men," he said, glancing sideways at Bragelonne, "but to lose it wrestling with the salt sea is not to my taste."

"And as for me," said Manicamp, "even if we made it to the ships, my last decent outfit would be ruined by the salt water, and that's quite unthinkable."

"So, you refuse as well?" asked de Guiche.

"I should say so; it's entirely out of the question."

“But de Wardes, Manicamp, just look,” cried de Guiche. “Can’t you see? Out there, on the flagship, the princesses are watching us.”

“All the more reason, cher ami, not to take a ridiculous dunking in front of them.”

“Is that your final word, Manicamp?”

“Indeed.”

“And you, de Wardes?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll go alone.”

“Not at all,” said Raoul. “I go where you go. I thought you knew that.”

In point of fact, Raoul, not driven by passion, had coolly assessed the danger and decided to risk what de Wardes would not.

The boat was casting off; de Guiche called out to the pilot, “Ahoy, the boat! Two more coming aboard!”

And, wrapping a handful of pistoles in a sheet of paper, he tossed it into the craft.

“So, you’re not afraid of a little salt water, my young masters?” called the pilot.

“We’re not afraid of anything,” replied de Guiche.

“Then come aboard, Messieurs.” The pilot steered the craft near the wharf, and the young men jumped lightly into the boat.

“Come, courage, my lads,” said de Guiche to the crew. “There are another twenty pistoles in this purse, and when we reach the flagship, they’re yours.”

At once the rowers bent over their oars and the boat bounded across the waves.

Everyone was watching this hazardous attempt, the whole population of Le Havre lining the jetties, every eye fixed on the pilot boat.

Sometimes the frail craft was suspended for a moment atop a foamy crest before plunging to the bottom of a roaring abyss, seemingly lost. But she always reappeared, and after an hour of struggle she came into the lee of the flagship, where two ship's boats were waiting to come to her aid.

On the quarterdeck of the flagship, sheltered by a canopy hung with velvet and ermine and held up by taut and powerful stays, Madame Henriette* the Dowager Queen and her daughter, the young Madame Henrietta, with *the admiral, the Duke of Norfolk*, 73 at their sides, had watched apprehensively as the approaching boat was raised to heaven one moment and plummeted toward hell the next. Against the dark waves they could see, like luminous apparitions, the bright and noble figures of the two French gentlemen. The ship's crew, leaning on the rail and hanging from the shrouds, had cheered the courage of the nobles, the pilot, and his sailors.

A triumphant huzzah welcomed their arrival on board. The Duke of Norfolk, a handsome man of age twenty-six or twenty-seven, came forward to meet them. De Guiche and Bragelonne came bounding up the starboard ladder, and, conducted by Norfolk, were escorted to greet the princesses.

Out of respect and a certain hesitation, which he barely acknowledged even to himself, the Comte de Guiche delayed looking directly at the young Madame. But Henrietta, on the contrary, picked him out right away and asked her mother, "Is this my Monsieur who's coming aboard?"

Madame Henriette, who was more familiar with Monsieur than her daughter, smiled at this error of self-importance and replied, "No, that's just Monsieur de Guiche, his favorite."

With this answer, the princess felt she'd best conceal her instinctive admiration of the count's courage. It was just as she was controlling her

expression that de Guiche finally dared to raise his eyes to her so he could compare the original to her portrait.

When he saw that pale face, those lively eyes, that adorable chestnut hair, those trembling lips, and her gesture so eminently royal and yet at the same time encouraging, he was so overcome with emotion that, if he hadn't been leaning on Raoul as he came over the rail, he would have staggered.

At his friend's astonished glance, and a benevolent nod from the queen, de Guiche recovered himself. In a few words, he introduced himself as Monsieur's envoy, explained his mission, and saluted, according to their rank and precedence, the admiral and the various English lords who were grouped around the princesses.

Raoul was presented in his turn, and, as the son of the Comte de La Fère, was graciously received, as everyone knew the part the count had

played in the restoration of King Charles II, and that it was the count who'd been charged with the negotiation of the marriage that returned to France the granddaughter of Henri IV. Raoul spoke English perfectly, and made himself the interpreter between his friend and those young English lords who were unfamiliar with French.

Just then there appeared a remarkably handsome young man garbed in rich and splendid raiment. He approached the princesses, who were conversing with the Duke of Norfolk, and said, with barely contained impatience, "Come, Ladies, it's time we went ashore."

At this invitation, the young Madame rose and moved to accept the hand the young man offered her, with an eagerness born of several motivations, but the admiral stepped between her and the newcomer. "A moment, if you please, Milord Buckingham," he said. "Getting the ladies to shore isn't possible right now. The sea is too unruly, but by four

bells it will probably settle, and they can disembark this evening.”

“I must say, Milord,” said Buckingham with an irritation he didn’t even try to disguise, “that you have no right to detain these ladies aboard your ship. One of them now belongs to France, alas! And France, as you see, has sent their ambassadors to claim her.” And he gestured toward de Guiche and Raoul, while bowing to them.

“I scarcely think these gentlemen intend to risk the lives of the princesses,” the admiral replied.

“Milord, these gentlemen have arrived despite the wind in their faces; permit me to believe it’s no more dangerous for the ladies, who will travel with the wind behind.”

“These gentlemen were very brave,” said the admiral. “As you can see, the harbor is lined with hundreds who didn’t dare to follow them. Their chivalrous desire to present themselves to Madame as soon as possible led them to challenge the

sea, which today is terrible even for sailors. I'll hold up these gentlemen as an example my crew should follow, but these noble ladies must not."

A sidewise glance from Madame spotted the blush that rose to the count's cheeks, a look that escaped Buckingham. His eyes were fixed on Norfolk, and it was evident that he was jealous of the admiral, burning with the desire to remove the princesses from that floating realm where the admiral was king.

"In that case," said Buckingham, "I appeal to Madame in person."

"And I, Milord," replied the admiral, "appeal to my conscience and my responsibility. I promised to return Madame to France safe and sound, and I intend to keep my promise."

"But, see here, Sir..."

"Milord Buckingham, permit me to remind you that I am in sole command here."

“Milord Admiral, do you know whom you address?” replied Buckingham, voice rising.

“Perfectly, Milord, and I repeat: I am in sole command here, over the sea, the wind, the ships, and the sailors.” He pronounced these words with nobility and grandeur.

Raoul paid close attention to Buckingham, as the duke shuddered and grasped at one of the pavilion’s posts to keep from falling, his eyes red with rage, his other hand creeping toward the hilt of his sword.

“Milord,” said the queen, “permit me to say that I entirely agree with the Duke of Norfolk. Even if the wind, so unruly at the moment, were completely calm and favorable, we still owe a few hours to this officer who’s conducted us so pleasantly and carefully to within sight of the coast of France, where he must leave us.”

Buckingham, instead of responding, looked for guidance from Madame. But Henrietta, half hidden behind the gold and velvet curtains

that sheltered her, wasn't listening, as her eyes were on the Comte de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul. This was a fresh blow to Buckingham, who thought he detected in Madame Henrietta's gaze something more than mere curiosity. He reeled back against the mainmast.

"Milord Buckingham still has no sea-legs," said the queen mother in French. "Perhaps that's why he's so keen to go ashore."

At these words, the young man turned pale, dropped his hands in discouragement to his sides, and withdrew, expressing with a single deep sigh both his old loves and his new hostilities.

The admiral, however, invited the princesses into the stern cabin, where a farewell dinner had been laid out with a magnificence worthy of his guests.

At the table, the admiral sat to the right of Madame and placed the Comte de Guiche to her left—the place usually occupied by

Buckingham. The duke, when he entered the cabin, felt another blow when he saw the secondary seat where, by etiquette, he was now relegated with respect to his princess. For his part, de Guiche, paler perhaps from happiness than his rival was from fury, trembled as he sat next to the princess, and when he brushed against her silk dress felt shudders of pleasure such as he'd never known.

After the meal, Buckingham sprang forward to offer Madame his hand. But it was now de Guiche's turn to give the duke a lecture. "Milord," he said, "be so kind as to stop interposing yourself between Her Royal Highness Madame and me. From now on Her Royal Highness belongs to France, and it is the hand of Monsieur, the king's brother, who touches the hand of the princess when Her Royal Highness does me the honor to take my hand."

And, having said these words, he offered his hand to the young Madame with a timidity so obvious

and yet with such courageous nobility that the assembled English lords murmured in admiration, while Buckingham sighed in anguish.

Raoul, who knew what it meant to be in love, saw it all and understood completely. He gave de Guiche one of those looks that only a close friend or mother can give to one held dear who is about to go badly astray.

Finally, toward two o'clock, the sun came out, the wind fell, the sea calmed to a sheet of crystal, and the fog shrouding the coast was shredded and torn away. Then the smiling hills of France appeared, its slopes dotted with white houses, bright against the green of the trees or the deep blue of the sky.

XXXV

The Pavilions

Tseen, had decided to ignore Buckingham's threatening glares and outbursts. It had been going on ever since they left England, and he'd learned to put up with the duke's behavior. De Guiche hadn't yet paid much attention to the animosity the young lord seemed to feel toward him, though he instinctively felt no sympathy toward the favorite of Charles II. The queen mother, with greater experience and a cooler head,

had a firmer grasp of the situation and, aware of its dangers, was ready to force a clean break when the right moment arrived.

That moment had come. Calm had been restored to the entire company except in the heart of Buckingham, who implored the young princess in a low voice, “Madame, Madame, in the name of heaven, let’s go ashore, I beg you! Can’t you see how this insolent Duke of Norfolk is killing me with his impertinent attentions to you?”

Henrietta heard these words, smiled and, without turning around, replied in that tone of languid reproach that coquettishly pushes back without pushing away, “Dear Milord, I’ve already told you that you must be quite mad.”

As we’ve said, none of the nuances of this scene escaped Raoul; he heard Buckingham’s plea, the princess’s response, watched Buckingham step back as if struck, sigh, and put a hand to his forehead—and Raoul, with

an open heart behind his eyes and ears, understood the state of affairs and shuddered.

The admiral, after careful deliberation, finally gave the order to launch the ship's boats. When Buckingham heard these orders, he reacted with such unrestrained glee a stranger might think he'd lost his mind. At the Duke of Norfolk's orders, a grand barge, elaborately decorated, large enough for twenty oarsmen and fifteen passengers, was lowered over the side of the flagship. Its deck was carpeted in velvet, banners sported the arms of England, and its rigging was garlanded with flowers, for at that time diplomacy was draped in decoration, and this was a vessel for royalty.

The barge was scarcely in the water, the rowers standing by their oars like soldiers at attention awaiting the embarkation of the princess, when Buckingham hastened to the top of the ladder that led to the boat. But the queen stopped him. "Milord," she said, "it's improper for

me and my daughter to go ashore before you've ascertained that our lodgings there are in order. Go ahead, Milord, I pray, to make sure that everything is prepared for our arrival."

This was a new blow to the duke, all the more terrible because it was unexpected. He stammered, turned red, and was silent, crushed. He'd thought to accompany Madame during the stately approach of the barge, savoring every last moment near her.

But the order was clear. The admiral, who'd heard it, immediately cried, "Launch the longboat!" The order was executed with the speed typical of a well-disciplined warship. Buckingham, stricken, sent a look of despair toward the princess, a look of entreaty toward the queen, and a look of fury toward the admiral.

The princess pretended not to notice, the queen turned her head, and the admiral laughed.

Buckingham, at this laugh, took a

step toward Norfolk. The queen rose with a glare. "On your way, Milord," she said with authority.

The young duke stopped short. Then, making a final effort, he looked around and said, in a voice choked with emotion, "Messieurs! What of you, Monsieur de Guiche, and you, Monsieur de Bragelonne? Do you go with me?"

De Guiche bowed. "I am, like Monsieur de Bragelonne, at the queen's orders," he said. "What she commands, we will do." And he looked at the young princess, who lowered her eyes.

"Your pardon, Milord Buckingham," said the queen, "but the Comte de Guiche represents Monsieur in this; he must do for us the honors of France, as you have done the honors of England. It's his duty to accompany us, and in any event, he's earned that small favor by his courage in making his way to us through that foul weather."

Buckingham opened his mouth as

if to reply, but whether he couldn't think of anything to say or had lost the power to say it, no sound came from his lips. Turning as if in a delirium, he jumped down into the longboat. The rowers, surprised, were barely able to seat him and then settle themselves, as he'd almost capsized the boat.

"Really, milord must be mad," the admiral said to Raoul.

"I fear for him," replied Bragelonne.

As the longboat rowed away, the duke never stopped staring at the flagship, like a miser who'd lost his gold or a mother leaving behind her child to march to the scaffold. But no one responded to his looks, his gestures, and his sad, silent pleas. Finally, stunned, he slumped on a thwart, hands clutching his hair, as the carefree sailors diligently drove the longboat over the waves.

By the time they landed, he was in such a state of torpor that, if he hadn't been met by a messenger from

the steward he'd sent ahead to arrange the lodgings, he wouldn't have known what to do. He was led to the house that had been rented for him, where he *shut himself up like Achilles in his tent.* 74

Meanwhile, just as Buckingham went ashore, the barge bearing the princesses was leaving the flagship. It was followed by another longboat filled with officers, courtiers, and favored friends. Half the population of Le Havre, in fishing boats or Norman barges, was in the harbor to greet them. The guns of the forts sounded their salutes, and the flagship replied shot for shot, the mouths of the cannons spilling flames and smoke that blew away into the azure sky.

The princess stepped off the gangplank onto the stones of the quay, where joyful music greeted her and welcomed her ashore. As she advanced toward the city center, she walked upon rich tapestries strewn with fresh flowers.

Meanwhile de Guiche and Raoul ducked out of the English procession and made their way quickly along side streets toward the residence designated for Madame.

“We’d better hurry,” Raoul said to de Guiche. “If I know Buckingham, he’ll cause trouble when he sees the results of yesterday’s preparations.”

“We’re ready no matter what,” said the count. “We left behind de Wardes, who is severity personified, and Manicamp, who is the essence of gentility.”

But de Guiche hurried nonetheless, and five minutes later they came in sight of the Hôtel de Ville. The first thing they saw was the crowd filling the municipal square. “Good!” said de Guiche. “Our lodgings are ready, as planned.”

In fact, in the plaza before the grand hôtel had been erected eight elegant canvas pavilions sporting the united arms of France and England. The Hôtel de Ville was surrounded by these brightly colored tents, while ten

pages and twelve cavaliers ready to escort the ambassadors stood waiting before them. The resulting spectacle was curious, strange, and almost magical; these improvised lodgings had sprung up overnight, thrown together from the richest materials de Guiche had been able to buy in Le Havre, and stood in front of all the entrances to the Hôtel de Ville, the designated residence of the young princess. They were linked to each other by twisted garlands of silk behind which stood French guards, so that if Buckingham's plan had been to control access to the Hôtel de Ville, it was completely foiled.

The only way to approach the steps of the city building was to pass between the two grandest pavilions, the doors of which faced each other in front of the hôtel's entrance. These two tents were those of de Guiche and Raoul, occupied in their absence by de Wardes in de Guiche's pavilion and Manicamp in Raoul's. Around these two pavilions and the six secondary tents, a hundred officers, gentlemen, and pages, resplendent in

shining golden silk, buzzed around like bees at a hive.

There they waited, swords on their hips, ready to instantly obey a gesture from the chief ambassadors, de Guiche and Bragelonne. Just as those two young men appeared at the entrance to the square, they saw, crossing the plaza ahead of them at the gallop, a mounted gentleman clad in marvelous elegance. He rode through the curious crowd, and at the sight of the improvised lodgings he gave out a cry of anger and despair. It was Buckingham, recovered from his stupor to don a dazzling costume, and now come to await the arrival of Madame and the queen at the Hôtel de Ville.

But at the two main pavilions his passage was blocked, and he had to pull up short. Exasperated, Buckingham raised his whip, but two officers grabbed his arms. Only one of the wardens of the pavilions was there, as de Wardes was inside the Hôtel de Ville overseeing the preparations ordered by de Guiche. At

the commotion caused by Buckingham, Manicamp, who'd been relaxing on a pile of cushions just inside Raoul's pavilion, rose with his habitual nonchalance and sought the source of the disturbance. "Is there a problem?" he said suavely. "What's all this fuss about?"

His questions happened to come between ducal outbursts, so that despite their mild tone everyone heard them. Buckingham turned and regarded the long, lean figure with the indolent face. Possibly the appearance of our gentleman, who was dressed quite simply, didn't inspire his respect, for he replied with disdain, "Just who are you to ask, Monsieur?"

Manicamp leaned on the arm of a huge French guard standing like the pillar of a cathedral, and calmly replied, "You first, Monsieur."

"I? I am Milord the Duke of Buckingham. I rented all the houses around the Hôtel de Ville, where I have affairs to conduct, and as all

these houses belong to me, and since I rented them in order to have free passage to the Hôtel de Ville, you have no right to deny me passage.”

“But, Monsieur, who denies you passage?” asked Manicamp.

“Why, your guards.”

“That’s because you come on horseback, Monsieur, and the orders are to allow only pedestrians to pass.”

“No one has the right to give orders here but me,” said Buckingham.

“How so, Monsieur?” asked Manicamp in his soft voice. “Do me the honor to explain this mystery.”

“Because, as I told you, I’ve rented all the houses around the square.”

“We’re well aware of that, since only the square itself was left to us.”

“You are mistaken. Since the square is between my houses, it belongs to me.”

“Oh, pardon me, Monsieur, but it’s you who are mistaken. Here in France we say that the roads belong to the king, so the square is the king’s property—and as we’re the king’s ambassadors, the plaza belongs to us.”

“Monsieur, I already asked once, who are you?” cried Buckingham, exasperated by this cool reception.

“My name is Manicamp,” replied the young man in a voice as harmonious as the strum of *an Aeolian harp*. 75

Buckingham shrugged. “Enough,” he said as he dismounted. “When I rented these houses around the Hôtel de Ville, the square was empty. These shabby tents obstruct my view; remove them!”

The surrounding crowd responded to these words with a low and menacing murmur. Just then de Guiche arrived, stepping between the crowd and Buckingham on one side, while de Wardes, coming down the steps, did the same on the other.

“Pardon me, Milord,” said de Guiche, “but if you have any complaints, address them to me, as it was I who ordered these pavilions put here.”

“And I would like to add, Monsieur, that the word shabby could be regarded as objectionable,” said Manicamp smoothly.

“You were saying, Monsieur?” continued de Guiche to Buckingham.

“I was saying, Monsieur le Comte,” replied Buckingham, in a tone in which irritation was still detectable, though it was suppressed in the presence of an equal, “that it is impossible for these tents to remain where they are.”

“Impossible?” said de Guiche. “Why is that?”

“Because they annoy me.”

De Guiche started an intemperate gesture but restrained himself at a sharp glance from Raoul. He said, “They will bother you less, Monsieur, when you consider how they rectify

an abuse of priority.”

“An abuse!”

“Indeed. You sent an envoy who rented, on your behalf, the entire city center of Le Havre without considering the French ambassadors who must come to receive Madame. For the representative of a friendly nation, Monsieur le Duc, that was less than friendly.”

“The right of first possession takes precedence,” said Buckingham.

“Not in France, Monsieur.”

“And why not in France?”

“Because in France we observe courtesy.”

“Which means?” Buckingham barked, so angrily that the sentries stepped back, expecting an immediate outburst.

“Which means, Monsieur,” replied de Guiche, turning pale, “that I had these pavilions constructed for myself and my friends as lodging for

the ambassadors of France, as that was the sole recourse your actions had left us. And here, in this square in Le Havre, we remain, unless a will more powerful and with greater authority than yours makes us move.”

“I believe until lawfully evicted is the legal term,” said Manicamp sweetly.

“I know an authority, Monsieur, that I think you will respect,” said Buckingham, putting his hand on the hilt of his sword.

At that moment, when the Goddess of Discord was about to put all their hands to their swords, Raoul gently placed his hand on Buckingham’s arm. “A word, Milord,” he said.

“My right and my honor come first!” cried the fiery young man.

“It is precisely upon the point of honor that I must speak to you,” said Raoul quietly.

“Do so, but keep it short, Monsieur.”

“Just one question, so you see it couldn’t be shorter.”

“Speak, I’m listening.”

“Is it you or Monsieur le Duc d’Orléans who is to marry the granddaughter of King Henri IV?”

“What’s that?” asked Buckingham, stepping back in surprise.

“Answer me, Monsieur, if you please,” said Raoul calmly.

“Are you mocking me, Monsieur?” asked Buckingham.

“That question is answer enough for me, Monsieur. So, you admit that it isn’t you who is to marry the Princess of England.”

“You know that perfectly well, it seems to me.”

“Pardon me, but based on your conduct, it wasn’t clear that you know it.”

“What are you trying to say to me, Monsieur?”

Raoul stepped closer to the duke and lowered his voice. "Are you aware, Milord, that your angry behavior looks a lot like jealousy? Jealousy of a woman from a man who is neither her lover nor her husband casts a shadow on all concerned, the more so when the woman is a royal princess."

"Monsieur!" cried Buckingham. "Do you insult Madame Henrietta?"

"If you're not careful, Milord," said Bragelonne coldly, "it is you who will subject her to insult. On the flagship, you tried the admiral's patience and pushed the queen to her limits. I watched you, Milord, and thought you must have taken leave of your senses—but since then I've guessed what it is that's really driving you."

"Monsieur!"

"Just one more word: I hope we can keep it so I'm the only one in the French delegation who's guessed the truth."

"Are you aware, Monsieur," said

Buckingham, trembling from a mixture of anger and anxiety, “that that’s the kind of language that must meet a certain reply?”

“Choose your words carefully, Milord,” said Raoul with hauteur. “Those of my blood do not speak recklessly, while you, on the contrary, are of a heritage that makes all true Frenchmen wary. I say to you for the second time: take care, Milord.”

“What’s this? Are you threatening me?”

“I am the son of the Comte de La Fère, Monsieur de Buckingham, and I never threaten because I strike first. So, listen, not to my threat, but to my promise....”

Buckingham clenched his fists, but Raoul continued as if he hadn’t noticed. “If you say anything improper that reflects on Her Royal Highness, just one word, well.... Show some patience, Monsieur de Buckingham, and watch yourself, for I, too, will be watching.”

“You?”

“Me. As long as Madame was under English protection, I held back; but now that her foot has touched French soil, now that she’s been received in the name of the prince, at the first insult which you, in your unwise attachment, commit to the House of France, I will respond in one of two ways: either I will denounce your folly before the entire Court and prompt a shameful recall to England, or, if you prefer, I will simply run my dagger through your throat. Frankly, the second means would suit me the best.”

Buckingham turned paler than the ruff of English lace around his neck. “Monsieur de Bragelonne,” he said, “can this really be the speech of a gentleman?”

“It is, when the gentleman speaks to a madman. Get hold of yourself and this gentleman will speak to you quite differently.”

“Oh, but Monsieur de Bragelonne,” murmured the duke, voice breaking,

“Monsieur de Bragelonne, you must see that all this is killing me!”

“And if it killed you,” said Raoul with his untouchable sang froid, “I’d have to regard it as a lucky outcome, as it would put an end to this folly, and there’d be no more of this language and behavior that threatens to compromise illustrious persons of high rank.”

“Oh, you’re right!” said the distraught young man. “You’re right. Yes, better to die than to suffer what I’m going through now.” He put his hand on an ornamental dagger with a jeweled hilt and half drew it from his belt.

Raoul shoved his hand aside. “Take care, Milord,” he said. “If you failed to kill yourself, you’d look ridiculous, and if you succeeded your blood would stain the nuptial gown of the Princess of England.”

Buckingham stood for a moment, gasping for breath, lips trembling, cheeks quivering, eyes staring as if in delirium. Then he suddenly breathed

deeply, squared his shoulders, and said, "Monsieur de Bragelonne, I have never met a nobler spirit than yours, and you are a worthy son of the most perfect gentleman I know. Keep your pavilions!"

And he threw his arms around Raoul's shoulders. All those watching, amazed by this embrace that upended all their expectations, given the fury of one adversary and the obduracy of the other, began to applaud, and a thousand cheers rose to the sky. De Guiche in his turn embraced Buckingham, who was reluctant at first, but then returned it.

And that was the signal. English and French, who, a moment before, had regarded each other with suspicion, immediately fell to fraternizing. Such was the situation upon the arrival of the procession of the princesses, who, without Bragelonne, would have come into a battle with blood raining on the banners and flowers. But to the eyes of the princess and the queen, everything was in perfect order.

XXXVI

The Night

G the plaza of the pavilions. English and French surpassed each other in gallantry and courtesies to the royal travelers. The English, who had purchased great quantities of flowers in advance, sent them to the French in honor of the young princess; the French invited the English to dine with them at a great feast planned for the next day. Madame was applauded wherever she passed. She seemed as regal as a queen in the eyes of all who respected her, and as holy as an idol to those who adored her.

The queen mother returned the

affectionate welcome of the French. France was her homeland, and she'd been too unhappy in England to ever forget France. She'd taught her daughter, through her own love, to love the country where both had found hospitality in a troubled past, and where they were now come to find the fortune of a brilliant future.

The royal entrance complete, the spectators beginning to scatter, the fanfares finished and the sound of the crowd subsiding, night fell, enveloping under its starry veil the sea, the countryside, the harbor, and the city, still bustling in the aftermath of the great event. De Guiche returned to his pavilion and sat on a camp stool with such a pained expression that Bragelonne, who followed him, paused until he heard him sigh, and then approached. The count was leaning against the wall of the tent, his head in his hands, breath ragged, knees trembling.

“Are you suffering, my friend?” asked Raoul.

“Cruelly.”

“Physically in pain?”

“Oh, yes.”

“It was an exhausting day,” continued the young viscount, eyes fixed on his friend, assessing.

“It was. Maybe, with sleep, I’ll recover.”

“Do you want me to leave you?”

“No, I need to talk to you.”

“Of course. But first, de Guiche, I have questions to ask.”

“Ask, then.”

“Be honest.”

“I always am.”

“Do you know why Buckingham was so furious?”

“I have an idea.”

“You think he’s in love with Madame, am I right?”

“Hard to think otherwise, looking at him.”

“Well! I think not.”

“Oh! This time you’re wrong, Raoul. I read the pain in his eyes, in his words, his every act from the morning onward.”

“You’re a poet, my dear Count, and see poetry wherever you look.”

“More than that, I see love.”

“Even where there is none.”

“Where there is.”

“Come, de Guiche, don’t you think you’re fooling yourself?”

“I know exactly what I’m saying!” the count said sharply.

“Tell me, Count,” asked Raoul with a significant look, “why love is what you think you see.”

“Well,” said de Guiche, hesitating, “experience, I guess.”

“Experience! So, you think you can

trust your judgment.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“I’m saying, my friend, that you’re not usually so disturbed as you are tonight.”

“I’m tired.”

“You’re tired?”

“Yes.”

“Listen, dear friend, we’ve fought on campaign together, ridden eighteen hours at a stretch, killed our horses beneath us, fell down hungry and exhausted, and yet we laughed. It isn’t because you’re tired, Count, that you’re sad.”

“I’m upset, then.”

“Upset? About what?”

“What happened tonight.”

“Lord Buckingham’s folly?”

“What else? Shouldn’t it upset us, as Frenchmen who represent our prince, to see an Englishman pay

court to our future princess, the second lady of the realm?"

"Yes, I would be upset—if I thought Lord Buckingham an actual danger."

"Oh, but he is. He came roaring in, stirring up trouble between us and the English, and if it wasn't for you, so calm and so firm, there'd have been swordplay in the plaza."

"But he did calm down, as you saw."

"Yes, he did, and it was astounding. You spoke quietly with him; what did you say? You could see that he loves her, but somehow you talked him out of it. He must not really love her, then!" De Guiche said this with such emphasis that Raoul looked at him sharply. The young noble's passion was easily read.

"What did I say to him, Count?" said Raoul. "I'll repeat it to you. Listen closely, here it is: 'Milord, you look with an air of envy, of dangerous lust, upon the sister of your king, who

is engaged to someone else and who can never return your love; and this is an affront to those, like us, who come to bring this young woman to her intended spouse.”

“You said that?” asked de Guiche, coloring.

“Not just that, but more than that.”

De Guiche flinched.

“I said to him, ‘What would you think if you saw one of us so improper, so disloyal, as to show inappropriate feelings toward the princess destined for our master?’”

These words hit de Guiche so hard that he paled, shuddered, and stretched one hand out toward Raoul while the other covered his eyes and forehead.

“But,” continued Raoul without appearing to notice his friend’s reaction, “the French, thank God, though accused of being frivolous, indiscreet, even reckless, know to rely on sound judgment and solid morality

when faced with questions of such high importance. You should know, Milord Buckingham,' I added, 'that we gentlemen of France serve our kings by sacrificing our passions as well as our fortunes and our lives, and that if, by some chance, the Devil suggests one of those evil thoughts that inflames the heart, we extinguish that flame, even if we must quench it in blood. That way, we preserve three honors: our country's, our master's, and our own. That's how we behave, Milord Buckingham, and it's how every man of honor should behave.' And that, my dear de Guiche," continued Raoul, "is how I spoke to Milord Buckingham, and why he gave in to my reasoning without resistance."

De Guiche, who'd been cringing at Raoul's words, now looked up, eyes bright, and feverishly gripped Raoul's hand; his cheeks, which had been pale as ice, now glowed red as flame. "And you spoke well," he said, voice choking. "Thank you, you're a good friend, Raoul. Now, please, leave me to myself."

“That’s what you want?”

“Yes, I need rest. Today was a disturbing day for me, in both mind and body. But tomorrow, when I see you again, I’ll be a new man.”

“Well, then! I’ll take my leave,” said Raoul, withdrawing.

The count stepped toward his friend and embraced him warmly. But behind this friendly embrace, Raoul thought he detected the trembling of a greater passion.

The night was cool, starry, and splendid; after the storm, the warmth of the sun had brought a general return of life and joy. A few long, slender clouds trailed across the sky behind a breeze from the east, promising fine days ahead. In the square before the Hôtel de Ville, the dark shadows of the pavilions divided by bands of moonlight formed a vast mosaic of black and white. Soon the city was asleep ... but there was still a faint light in the window of Madame’s chamber that overlooked the square, the soft light of a dim lamp just

before it flickers out, a seeming symbol of the calm repose of a young woman who, scarcely aware of life's anxieties, slowly sinks into deep sleep.

Bragelonne emerged from his tent with the slow care of a man wishing to see while remaining unseen. From the opening between the door flaps he surveyed the entire square at a glance, and then, after a moment, saw the corners of the door to de Guiche's pavilion tremble and part. Behind the opening was the shadow of de Guiche, eyes glinting in the gloom as he fixed them on the window of Madame's chamber, still lit by the flickering glimmer from within. The soft glow that tinted that window was the count's pole star. In his eyes could be seen the aspirations of his entire soul.

Raoul, hidden in the shadows, guessed at the passionate longings that formed between the young ambassador and the young princess behind the balcony a mysterious bond of sympathetic magic, a link

forged of will and obsession that must have sent amorous dreams into the chamber the count gazed at, his soul in his eyes.

But de Guiche and Raoul weren't the only ones who were awake. The window of one of the houses overlooking the square was open, in the house occupied by Buckingham. The silhouette of the duke, leaning on the carved and velvet-trimmed windowsill, was sending across to the light in Madame's window its own wild message of love.

Bragelonne noticed and couldn't help but smile. Thinking of Madame, he said, "There is a poor heart thoroughly besieged."

Then, with a sympathetic thought for Monsieur, he added, "And there is a poor husband thoroughly threatened. He's lucky that he's a great prince with an army to watch out for him."

Bragelonne gazed a while longer at the silent appeals of the two suitors, while listening to the indecorous

snoring of Manicamp, who wheezed as proudly as if he were wearing his suit of blue and gold instead of just his purple doublet, nearly drowning out the breeze that brought the distant song of a nightingale; and with that added to his store of melancholy, Raoul returned to his bed, wondering if maybe two or even three pairs of eyes as ardent as those of de Guiche and Buckingham were turned upon the window of his beloved back in the château at Blois. "And Mademoiselle de Montalais isn't the most dependable defender, alas," he whispered to himself with a sigh.

XXXVII

From Le *H*avre to Paris

Twelcome festivities were celebrated with all the pomp and merriment the city and its residents could muster. And meanwhile, during the final hours the French cortège spent in Le Havre, they prepared for their departure.

After the grand welcome, Madame first bid farewell to the English fleet, honoring the nation by saluting their

flags; she then got into her carriage surrounded by a brilliant procession. De Guiche had hoped that Buckingham would return with the admiral to England, but Buckingham had persuaded the queen that it would be improper to leave Madame without a ranking English noble to escort her to Paris.

Buckingham, having scored the point that he would accompany Madame, chose a glittering entourage of gentlemen and officers with which to surround himself, so that it was almost an army that marched toward Paris, scattering gold and drawing excited crowds in the towns and villages through which they proceeded.

The weather was perfect. France was beautiful to see, especially along the route the cortège had chosen. Spring tossed its flowers and sweet-smelling foliage at the feet of youth as it passed. Normandy, with its lush vegetation, blue horizons, and silvery streams, presented itself as a pastoral paradise for the king's new

sister. The journey was an ongoing entertainment and festival, and de Guiche and Buckingham surrendered to it, de Guiche hoping to eclipse the efforts of the Englishman, and Buckingham trying to recall in the princess's heart recollections of happy days in the country she'd left behind. But alas, the poor duke could clearly see that the memory of his dear England was fading day by day in Madame's mind as she increasingly recalled her love of France. In fact, he saw that all his efforts awoke no longing in her for England, and that though he rode with skill and grace on a high-spirited Yorkshire charger, it was only occasionally and by accident that the princess's gaze lit upon him.

In vain did he attempt, when one of those looks was turned toward him, to make his mount produce all it could from strength, spirit, force, and finesse: in vain did he drive the horse to risky extremes, to headlong, breakneck leaps over logs and ditches that did no more than cause Madame, attracted by the commotion,

to turn her head for a moment and then, smiling slightly, return to her loyal guardians, Raoul and de Guiche, who rode calmly beside the doors to her carriage.

Buckingham fell prey to all the torments of jealousy, a pain deeper than any he'd ever known, burning in his veins and besieging his heart; then, as if to show that he was aware of his folly, and that he wished to redeem his recklessness by humble submission, he tamed his foaming horse and forced it, dripping with sweat, into the crowd around the coach, among the throng of courtiers.

Sometimes as a reward he was afforded a word of recognition from Madame, a word that seemed to him little more than a reproach. "There, Milord Buckingham," she would say, "that's much more reasonable."

Or Raoul would remark, "Don't kill your horse, Milord Buckingham."

Buckingham bore this patiently from Raoul, for he instinctively knew, without any direct evidence, that

Raoul was also reining in de Guiche, and that, without Raoul on hand, there would already have been some kind of clash between the count and Buckingham that might have gotten one or both of them exiled in disgrace.

Since the confrontation between the young men among the pavilions of Le Havre, in which Raoul had forced the duke to acknowledge his inappropriate behavior, Buckingham had, despite himself, come to respect Raoul. He often engaged him in conversation, usually to talk about his father or about d'Artagnan, their mutual friend, about whom Buckingham was almost as enthusiastic as Raoul. Bragelonne was always happy to talk about d'Artagnan, particularly in front of de Wardes, who during the entire trip was seething with resentment toward Raoul, especially regarding his influence over de Guiche. De Wardes had the sharp eye of the mean spirited and saw how de Guiche yearned for the attentions of the princess.

Instead of addressing the subject with Raoul's reserve, treating it with the appropriate dignity and propriety, de Wardes deliberately aggravated the count by appealing to his youthful audacity and selfish pride. Thus it happened that one evening, when they were paused at Mantes, de Guiche and de Wardes were talking together, leaning on a fence, while Buckingham and Raoul were strolling up and down and conversing, and Manicamp was paying court to the princesses, who had already learned to enjoy his company without taking him seriously, thanks to his agile wit and his smooth manners, which were as supercilious as they were obsequious.

"Confess," said de Wardes to the count, "that you're suffering badly and your friend the pedagogue offers no cure."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the count.

"But you do—you're smitten by love."

“That’s crazy, de Wardes!”

“It would be crazy, I agree, if Madame was indifferent to your passion. But she’s aware of it to the point of compromising herself, and I fear that when you arrive in Paris, your pedagogue will denounce the both of you.”

“Oh, de Wardes! Yet another attack on Bragelonne!”

“Come, enough of this childish pretense,” continued the count’s cunning tempter in a low voice. “You know as well as I do what the truth is: you’ve seen how the princess’s gaze softens when she speaks to you, you can tell from the sound of her voice that she likes to hear yours. You see how she hangs on the verses you recite to her, and then doesn’t she say the next morning that she slept badly the night before?”

“Even if all that’s true, de Wardes, what’s the point of bringing it up?”

“Isn’t it important to see the situation clearly?”

“Not when the sight would drive one mad.”

And he turned to glance anxiously at the princess, as if, despite denying de Wardes’s accusations, he sought confirmation of them from her eyes.

“See there?” said de Wardes. “That look from her is as good as a summons! Come, take advantage of the opportunity while your pedagogue isn’t around to interfere.”

De Guiche couldn’t resist; an invincible attraction drew him toward the princess.

De Wardes looked on and smiled.

“Ah, but you’re mistaken, Monsieur de Wardes,” said Raoul suddenly, appearing around the fence on which the two had been leaning. “The pedagogue is here and heard what you said.”

De Wardes recognized Raoul’s voice the moment he spoke, and half drew his sword.

“Sheathe your sword,” said Raoul.

“You know perfectly well that on a mission like ours such a display is unthinkable. Sheathe your sword, and also your tongue. Why pour into the heart of one you call your friend a dose of the poison that eats at your own? It’s the same as when you tried to turn him against another good man, my father’s friend and mine. Now you’re trying to get the count to pursue a woman who’s destined for your master, the prince. Really, Monsieur, I’d take you for a cowardly meddler, if you didn’t seem more like a madman!”

“Monsieur,” cried de Wardes, exasperated, “I was right to call you a pedagogue! This haughty tone you affect is more that of a Jesuit schoolmaster than the speech of a gentleman. Don’t speak in a tone like that when you speak to a man like me. And Monsieur d’Artagnan earned my hatred because he dealt with my father in a cowardly fashion.”

“That, Monsieur, is a lie,” said Raoul coldly.

“What!” cried de Wardes. “Do you call me a liar, Monsieur?”

“Why not, if what you say is a lie?”

“You call me a liar, and yet you don’t draw your sword?”

“Monsieur, I swore an oath to myself not to kill you until after we’ve turned Madame over to her bridegroom.”

“You, kill me? You might slap my wrist with a ruler, Monsieur Pedagogue, but no more.”

“True, a ruler wouldn’t kill,” replied Raoul in voice of ice, “but the sword of Monsieur d’Artagnan would—and I not only have his sword, Monsieur, but he taught me how to use it. And it’s with that sword, Monsieur, that I will in time avenge the lies you’ve spoken about him.”

“Take care, Monsieur,” snarled de Wardes. “If you don’t give me immediate satisfaction, I’ll use whatever means I must to get even.”

“I think not, Monsieur,” said

Buckingham, suddenly appearing on stage. "That's a vow that sounds very much like a threat of assassination. Hardly proper for a gentleman."

"What are you saying, Monsieur le Duc?" said de Wardes, turning on him.

"I'm saying that, to my English ears, what you said sounded very wrong indeed."

"Well, Monsieur!" said de Wardes, now furious. "If that's so, all the better. At least in you I won't find the kind of man who slips away from a fight. Take my words however you like."

"I take them as I hear them, and my hearing is excellent," said Buckingham in his haughty tone that gave every statement an air of defiance. "Monsieur de Bragelonne is my friend; you insult Monsieur de Bragelonne; you will give me satisfaction for that insult."

De Wardes glanced at Bragelonne, who, sticking to his chosen role,

remained cool and calm, even after the duke's challenge. "It seems to me I must not have insulted Monsieur de Bragelonne," said de Wardes, "because Monsieur de Bragelonne, who wears a sword, doesn't act like a man who's been insulted."

"But you were certainly insulting someone."

"Yes, I insult Monsieur d'Artagnan!" replied de Wardes, who'd noticed that this was the only rowel he could use to spur Raoul's anger.

"That's something else entirely," said Buckingham.

"It is, isn't it?" said de Wardes. "And it's up to the friends of Monsieur d'Artagnan to defend him."

"I agree with you on that," said the Englishman, who'd regained his composure. "If Monsieur de Bragelonne were insulted, I couldn't reasonably come to the defense of Monsieur de Bragelonne, since he's right here. But once it's a question of

Monsieur d'Artagnan....”

“You step aside, eh, Monsieur?”
said de Wardes.

“No, on the contrary, I draw,” said Buckingham, sliding his sword from its scabbard. “For though Monsieur d'Artagnan may have offended your father, he rendered, or at least tried to render, a great service to mine.”

De Wardes shook his head as if stunned.

“Monsieur d'Artagnan,” continued Buckingham, “is the most gallant gentleman I know. Having obligations to him, I would be delighted to repay them upon you with the point of a sword.”

And Buckingham raised his sword, saluted Raoul, and placed himself on guard.

De Wardes drew his own steel.

“Come, come, Messieurs,” said Raoul, stepping forward and placing his own naked blade between the combatants. “This affair is scarcely

worth spilling blood over right before the eyes of the princess. Monsieur de Wardes speaks ill of Monsieur d'Artagnan, but he doesn't even know him."

"What?" said de Wardes, grinding his teeth and dropping the point of his blade to the toe of his boot. "You say I don't know Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"That's right. You not only don't know him," Raoul said coldly, "you don't even know where to find him."

"I don't know where to find him?"

"Obviously, since you're picking a fight with strangers instead of with Monsieur d'Artagnan himself."

De Wardes paled.

"Well, then! I'll tell you where to find him," continued Raoul. "Monsieur d'Artagnan is in Paris, in the Louvre when he's on duty, and in the Rue des Lombards when he's not. Monsieur d'Artagnan is easily found at either of these locations, so, with the

grievances you bear against him, it would be gallant of you to go where he can be found. That way he can give you the satisfaction you seem to ask of everyone but him.”

De Wardes wiped his forehead, which dripped with sweat.

“For shame, Monsieur de Wardes,” continued Raoul. “It isn’t right to go around provoking fights when we have edicts against dueling. Think about it: the king would be angry with us for our disobedience, especially given our current responsibilities, and the king would be in the right.”

“Excuses!” murmured de Wardes. “Excuses and pretexts!”

“Besides,” said Raoul, “you were talking nonsense, my dear Monsieur de Wardes. You’re well aware that the Duke of Buckingham is a gallant man who’s already fought ten duels and will certainly fight eleven. What the devil! His name practically requires it. As for me, you know that I’m a fighter as well. I fought at *Lens, at Bléneau, at the Dunes, 76* and not just in front

of the gunners but a hundred paces in advance of the line—while you, it must be said, were a hundred paces behind it. Maybe in a battle, among so many other people, no one could notice your courage, and you'd like to show it off, but this isn't the time or place for it. And don't count on me, Monsieur de Wardes, to help you with your little project, because I wouldn't give you the pleasure."

"You talk sense," said Buckingham, sheathing his sword, "and I apologize, Monsieur de Bragelonne, for allowing myself to be tempted into drawing first."

"No!" de Wardes shouted, leaping forward furiously and lunging toward Raoul, who had only time enough for a parry in quarte.

"Watch it, Monsieur," said Bragelonne calmly. "You could put somebody's eye out."

"Then you won't fight?" cried de Wardes.

"At the moment, I will not—but I'll

tell you what I'll do when we reach Paris: I'll take you to Monsieur d'Artagnan, to whom you can recount what grievances you have against him. Monsieur d'Artagnan will ask the king for permission to cross swords with you, the king will grant it, and once you've met his sword, well, my dear Monsieur de Wardes! You will take more seriously the words of the Gospel that tell us to forgive others' trespasses."

"Agh!" cried de Wardes, inflamed by such coolness. "It's clear that you're at least half a bastard, Monsieur de Bragelonne!"

Raoul went as pale as the lace at his collar, and his eye flashed in a way that made de Wardes take a step back. When Buckingham saw that, he threw himself between the two adversaries, whom he expected to tear each other apart. De Wardes had saved this insult for the last; his sword trembled eagerly as he awaited an attack.

"You're right, Monsieur," said

Raoul, making a heroic effort to control himself. "I know only my father's name. But I know too well that the Comte de La Fère is a man of honor and worth to fear for a moment that, as you imply, there's a stain upon my birth. My ignorance of my mother's name is therefore for me a misfortune but not a disgrace. The shame is on you, Monsieur, for your discourtesy in reproaching me for a misfortune. But no matter: the insult exists, and I must respond to it. So, if you please, after you settle your quarrel with Monsieur d'Artagnan, you will have me to deal with."

"Oh ho!" replied de Wardes with a bitter smile. "I admire your deliberation, Monsieur. Just now you promised me a thrust from Monsieur d'Artagnan's sword, but I'm to take a thrust from yours only after one from him. Very prudent."

"Oh, never fear," replied Raoul, an edge to his voice. "Monsieur d'Artagnan is a master of arms, and I'll ask him to take the same care with you that he did with your father

and refrain from killing you, so he'll leave me the pleasure, once you've recovered, of killing you myself. You are rotten to the core, Monsieur de Wardes, and one can't, in good conscience, take too many precautions against you."

"As I shall take my precautions against you," said de Wardes. "Count on it."

"Monsieur," said Buckingham, "allow me to interpret your words by giving a piece of advice to Monsieur de Bragelonne: Monsieur, under your everyday doublet, wear armor."

De Wardes clenched his fists. "Oh, I see," he said. "You gentlemen are waiting till you've taken that advice before you measure your swords against mine."

"Very well, then, Monsieur," said Raoul, "since you absolutely demand it, let's finish this." And he took a step toward de Wardes, extending his sword.

"What are you doing?" asked

Buckingham.

“Nothing much,” said Raoul. “This won’t take long.”

De Wardes came on guard, and their blades touched. De Wardes then lunged so hastily that, from Raoul’s easy parry, it was obvious to Buckingham that Raoul was sparing his adversary.

Buckingham took a step back and watched the duel. Raoul was as calm as if sparring with a foil rather than fighting with a sword; he freed his weapon, which was pressed up to the hilt, with a backstep, and parried three or four more blows from de Wardes. Then, threatened by a low thrust, he parried de Wardes’s sword with a circular bind, whipped the blade out of his hand and sent it flying over the fence. And then, as de Wardes stood there stunned and disarmed, Raoul sheathed his blade, grabbed him by the collar and belt, and threw him over the fence after his sword.

“Next time! Next time!” snarled de

Wardes, as he picked up his sword and scrambled to his feet.

“No rush, by God,” said Raoul. “Give it at least an hour.” Then, turning to Buckingham, he said, “Duke, I implore you not to say a word about this incident. I’m ashamed at having gone this far, but anger got the better of me. Please forget all about it.”

“My dear Viscount,” said the duke, shaking his hand sincerely and long, “on the contrary, let’s both remember it and watch out for your safety. That man is dangerous and will murder you in a heartbeat.”

“My father lived for twenty years under the threat of a much more formidable enemy than him, and he still lives,” Raoul replied. “God protects those of my blood, Monsieur le Duc.”

“Your father had some very good friends, Viscount.”

“Yes,” sighed Raoul, “but there are no such friends around now.”

“Oh, never say that!” said Buckingham. “Not at the moment I offer you my own friendship!” And he spread his arms to embrace Bragelonne, who received the offer with joy.

“Men of my blood,” added Buckingham, “will die for those we love. You know that, Monsieur de Bragelonne.”

“Yes, Duke,” said Raoul. “I know it.”

XXXVIII

What the Chevalier de Lorraine *Thought of* Madame

N

rest of the journey. Under the pretext
of scouting the route, Monsieur de
Wardes left and rode ahead. He was

nothing disturbed the

scarcely missed.

With him he took Manicamp, whose congeniality and dreamy disposition served to balance his own temperament. High strung and quarrelsome types often seek out those of a soft and timid nature, as if the former sought relief from the contrast to their harsh moods, while the latter sought a defense for their weakness.

Buckingham and Bragelonne formed a trio of friendship with de Guiche, singing a chorus of praises in honor of the princess. To counter the dangerous habits of de Guiche and his rival, Bragelonne had organized the perpetual concert so the three would sing in harmony instead of solo arias.

These harmonious paeans pleased Madame Henriette the queen mother but were less appreciated by the young princess, who was a demon of coquetry and would have joined her voice to the solos in risky flirtation. She had one of those bold and

reckless hearts who seek strong emotion, even at the cost of pain. So her glances, her smiles, her flicks of her fan, rained down on the three young men in crushing volleys, and this inexhaustible ammunition was likewise expended at longer range on the gentlemen and officers of the escort, the citizens and aldermen of the towns they passed through, even the pages and the servants; it was a general slaughter, an ongoing massacre. By the time Madame arrived in Paris she'd broken a hundred thousand hearts along the road and had in her train a dozen devotees and two absolute lunatics.

Raoul alone was aware of her methods and immune to her seductions. His heart was already given to another and thus was no target for her arrows, so he arrived still cool and self-possessed at the capital of the realm. Once, along the way, he spoke with the Queen of England about the intoxicating effect Madame had on those around her, and her mother, who had learned wisdom from many misfortunes and

disappointments, replied, “Henrietta was born to be brilliant, whether in the light of a throne or in darkness, for she is a woman of imagination, caprice, and infinite will.”

De Wardes and Manicamp, gone ahead as heralds, announced the coming of the princess. The procession was met in Nanterre by a brilliant escort of cavaliers and carriages. It was Monsieur himself who, accompanied by the Chevalier de Lorraine and his other favorites, along with a company of the king’s household troops, had come to greet his fiancée. Just before then, at Saint-Germain, the princess and her mother had exchanged their travel coach, heavy and road-worn, for a light and elegant carriage drawn by six horses caparisoned in white and gold. In this setting, on a mobile throne under a silk parasol edged with a fringe of long feathers, the young and beautiful princess was displayed to all, her radiant face glowing with rosy highlights that emphasized her mother-of-pearl skin.

Monsieur, upon seeing the carriage, was struck by Madame's radiance, and expressed his admiration in such enthusiastic terms that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged and sniffed, while Buckingham and de Guiche were struck to the heart.

Once the ceremonies of reception were completed and the usual civilities had been exchanged, the procession, now enlarged, resumed making its slow way toward Paris. The introductions had been rushed, and though Buckingham and the other Englishmen had been introduced to Monsieur, the prince had paid little notice. But along the way, as he saw the duke paying his attentions with his usual ardor at the door of Madame's carriage, he asked his invariable favorite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, "Who is that cavalier?"

"He was presented to Your Highness just a few minutes ago," replied the chevalier. "He's the famously handsome Duke of Buckingham."

“Oh, right.”

“Madame’s ‘knight,’” added the favorite, with that tone the jealous use to give significance to even the simplest statement.

“What does that mean?” replied the prince, ever alert to such nuances.

“It just means he’s her knight.”

“Does Madame have a designated knight, then?”

“Dame! I would think you could see that for yourself. Look at them laughing and flirting, the pair of them.”

“You mean, the three of them.”

“Three? Why, what do you mean?”

“Can’t you see that de Guiche is joining in?”

“I do, but so what? It just means Madame has not one personal knight, but two.”

“You poison everything, you viper.”

“I don’t poison anything! Ah, Monseigneur, how ill-natured you are. Here we all are, paying the honors of the Kingdom of France to your wife, but somehow you’re displeased.”

The prince dreaded the chevalier’s satirical tone once it turned bitter and cutting, so he changed the subject. “The princess is quite pretty,” he said lightly, as if speaking of a stranger.

“Yes,” replied the chevalier in the same tone.

“The way you say yes sounds like no. Her dark eyes are quite lovely, it seems to me.”

“Small, though.”

“Small, but brilliant. She’s quite tall.”

“Tall enough to be awkward.”

“I don’t disagree. But she has an air of nobility.”

“Her features are too sharp.”

“Yet her teeth are admirable.”

“We see enough of them, God knows, given the size of her mouth. Really, Monseigneur, I was quite wrong: you are better-looking than your wife.”

“And do you think I’m more handsome than Buckingham? Tell me.”

“Oh, yes, and he’s well aware of it—see how he redoubles his attentions to Madame when you’re nearby.”

Monsieur flicked his reins in impatience, but as he saw a triumphant smile pass over the chevalier’s lips, he dropped back into a walk. “But really,” he said, “why should I worry about my lady cousin at all? Don’t I know her? Wasn’t I brought up with her? Didn’t I see her in the Louvre as a child?”

“She’s changed a bit since then, my Prince, if you don’t mind my saying so,” said the chevalier. “She was less brilliant then, and considerably less proud, at the time

of which you speak. Especially on that night, which I'm sure you remember, Monseigneur, when the king refused to dance with her because he thought her ugly and ill-dressed."

These words made the Duc d'Orléans frown. It wasn't very flattering to marry a princess whom the king had disdained in her youth. He was preparing an answer when de Guiche left the carriage and approached the prince. From a distance he'd seen the chevalier talking to the prince and seemed to guess at the nature of the conversation between Monsieur and his favorite—which the latter continued, from nastiness or impudence. "Count, you're a man of excellent taste," the chevalier said.

"Nice of you to say so," de Guiche replied, "but why bring it up?"

"Dame! I'll let His Highness answer that."

"I'll only say that de Guiche knows I consider him the perfect cavalier,"

said Monsieur.

“And that said, Count, you’ve been with Madame for a week now, haven’t you?” said the chevalier.

“Quite so,” replied de Guiche, blushing in spite of himself.

“Well, then! Tell us frankly what you think of her appearance.”

“Of her appearance?” said de Guiche, dumbfounded.

“Yes, of her appearance, and of her personality—everything about her, really.”

Struck speechless by this question, de Guiche hesitated to answer.

“Come now, de Guiche!” said the chevalier, laughing. “Tell us what you think—and be frank, Monsieur wants to know.”

“Yes, quite, be frank,” said Monsieur.

De Guiche stammered out

something unintelligible.

“I know it’s a delicate matter,” said Monsieur, “but you know you can say anything to me. What do you think of her?”

Caught by surprise, de Guiche fell back on the only defense he could muster: he lied. “I find Madame not so good, but not so bad, either,” he said. “A bit more good than bad.”

“Really, my dear Count!” said the chevalier. “You, who were in such ecstasies at the sight of her portrait!”

De Guiche blushed to his ears. Fortunately, his horse, which was a lively one, did a little caracole that served to hide his reaction. “Her portrait?” he muttered, drawing near again. “What portrait?”

The chevalier had never stopped watching him closely. “You remember the portrait. Doesn’t she resemble her miniature?”

“I ... don’t know. I don’t remember the portrait, it’s faded from my mind.”

"It made a strong impression on you at the time," said the chevalier.

"That's possible."

"Does she have wit, at least?" asked the prince.

"I think so, Monseigneur."

"And what about Buckingham?" asked the chevalier.

"I couldn't say."

"I think he must have some," replied the chevalier, "for he makes Madame laugh, and she seems to take a great deal of pleasure in his company, which doesn't happen to a witty woman in the company of a fool."

"Then he must be witty," said de Guiche naively, turning with relief at the arrival of Raoul, who'd noticed him being subjected to this dangerous inquisition. Raoul deftly changed the subject, and the interrogation was over.

The entry to Paris was grand and

jubilant. The king, to honor his brother, had ordered a magnificent reception. With a large and brilliant retinue, Madame and her mother were escorted to the Louvre—that same Louvre where, during their time in exile, they had suffered so painfully in obscurity, misery, and privation. That inhospitable lodging for the daughter of Henri IV, with its bare walls, cracked floors, ceilings draped with spider webs, cold chimneys and empty hearths barely warmed by the charity of parliament, had entirely changed: now it showed splendid draperies, thick carpets, new marble flooring, bright paintings in gilded frames, and mirrors that reflected candelabra everywhere. Light glinted from sumptuous furniture and the arms of the many ceremonial guards, plumes dancing above their heads, while behind them stood a crowd of servants and courtiers in the antechambers and on the staircases.

In the courtyards, where formerly grass and weeds had been allowed to grow, as if the contemptuous Mazarin

had thought it proper to show Parisians that neglect and disorder were, along with misery and despair, the lot of fallen monarchies—those vast and desolate courtyards were now thronged with brilliant mounted cavaliers whose horses' hoofs struck sparks from the gleaming cobblestones. Bright carriages overflowed with beautiful young ladies waiting to greet that Daughter of France who, during her widowhood and exile, sometimes couldn't find wood for her hearth or bread for her table, and whom the lowliest servants of the palace had treated with disdain.

But Madame Henriette returned to the Louvre with a heart more wounded by grief and bitter memories than that of her daughter Henrietta, whose nature was less reminiscent and more spontaneous, and brimming now with triumph and joy. The queen was well aware that this brilliant welcome was addressed to the proud mother of a king now placed on the second throne of Europe, while the previous ungracious

reception of the daughter of Henri IV had been a punishment for royal misfortune.

After the princesses had been installed in their apartments to be given time for a rest, their escorting cavaliers, needing also to recover from the fatigue of travel, left to go about their business. Raoul began by going to see his father, but Athos had left for Blois. He tried, then, to visit d'Artagnan, but he, busy organizing the young king's military household, was impossible to find. So Bragelonne fell back on seeking out de Guiche. But the count, accompanied by Manicamp, was consulting his tailors, a conference that was liable to last all day. The Duke of Buckingham was even busier, buying horse after horse and diamond upon diamond, monopolizing every other tailor, embroiderer, and jeweler in Paris. Buckingham and de Guiche were conducting a courteous rivalry in which, to ensure success, Buckingham was prepared to spend a million in gold, while de Guiche had

only his allowance from the Maréchal de Grammont of sixty thousand livres.

While Buckingham laughed and spent his million, de Guiche, egged on by de Wardes, groaned and tore out his hair. "A million!" he complained daily. "I'm doomed. Why won't the marshal advance me a share of my inheritance?"

"Because you'd just squander it," Raoul said.

"So? What does it matter to him? Maybe I should just die. Then I wouldn't need anything."

"Why this talk of dying?" asked Raoul.

"Better that than to be outdone in elegance by an Englishman."

"My dear Count," put in Manicamp, "elegance is less a matter of expense than of effort."

"Yes, but making an effort costs money, and I have only sixty thousand livres."

“Pardieu!” said de Wardes. “That is embarrassing, to say the least. You just need to spend the same amount as Buckingham; it’s only a difference of nine hundred and forty thousand livres.”

“But where would I get it?”

“Go into debt.”

“I’m there already.”

“Then you might as well go deeper.”

This kind of advice aggravated de Guiche into further spending, until he was deep in extravagance while Buckingham was just incurring expenses. The merchants of Paris were all excited by this spending spree, as orders for miracles issued from Buckingham’s rented mansion and the Hôtel de Grammont.

Meanwhile, as Madame was recovering from her travels, Bragelonne was writing to Mademoiselle de La Vallière. Four letters had already flown from his pen

with no answer forthcoming, when, on the very morning of the royal wedding, which was to take place in the chapel of the Palais Royal, Raoul, grooming himself in preparation, heard his footman announce, "Monsieur de Malicorne."

What can this Malicorne want with me? thought Raoul. "Make him wait," he told the footman.

"He's a gentleman from Blois," said the footman.

"Ah! Show him in!" said Raoul eagerly.

Malicorne entered, brilliant as the evening star and wearing a superb sword. After bowing gracefully, he said, "Monsieur de Bragelonne, I bring you a thousand greetings from a lady."

Raoul blushed. "From a lady," he said. "A lady of Blois?"

"Yes, Monsieur, from Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah, yes, thank you, Monsieur, I

recognize you now,” said Raoul. “And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais want with me?”

Malicorne drew four letters from his doublet and offered them to Raoul. “My letters!” said Bragelonne. “How can this be? And still sealed!”

“Monsieur, your letters couldn’t find the person they were intended for in Blois, and so we return them to you here.”

“Mademoiselle de La Vallière has left Blois?” cried Raoul.

“The week before last.”

“Then, where is she?”

“I believe she’s in Paris, Monsieur.”

“But how did you know these letters came from me?”

“Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your handwriting,” said Malicorne.

Raoul blushed and smiled. “How kind of Mademoiselle Aure,” he said.

“Always so thoughtful and charming.”

“Always, Monsieur.”

“But she ought to send me more precise information about Mademoiselle de La Vallière. I don’t know where to look in the immensity of Paris.”

Malicorne drew another envelope from his doublet. “Perhaps,” he said, “you’ll find what you wish to know in this.”

Raoul hastily broke the seal. The note within was from Mademoiselle Aure, and it read, “Paris, Palais Royal, day of the blessed nuptials.”

“What does this mean?” Raoul asked Malicorne. “Do you know, Monsieur?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Vicomte.”

“Then, in heaven’s name, tell me!”

“Impossible, Monsieur.”

“Why?”

“Because Mademoiselle Aure

forbade me to say.”

Raoul stared at this strange messenger, momentarily dumbstruck. “At least,” he finally said, “tell me whether this means good or ill for me.”

“You’ll find out.”

“This discretion is cruel!”

“A favor, if you will, Monsieur.”

“In exchange for the one you won’t do me?”

“Exactly.”

“Speak!”

“I have a powerful desire to see the wedding ceremony, but I have no invitation, despite my best efforts to acquire one. Could you get me in?”

“Yes, I could.”

“Please do that for me, Monsieur le Vicomte, I beg you.”

“Willingly, Monsieur. Come with me.”

“Monsieur, I am your humble servant.”

“But wait, aren’t you a friend of Monsieur de Manicamp?”

“Yes, Monsieur. But this morning, as I was watching him dress, I knocked a bottle of lace whitener onto his new suit and he flew at me sword in hand. I was compelled to depart in haste. So, I could have asked him for an invitation, but he’d have killed me.”

“Very possibly,” said Raoul. “I think Manicamp quite capable of killing someone for the crime you describe. But I’ll make up for your loss: just let me grab my half-cape and we’ll be on our way.”

XXXIX

Mademoiselle
de
Montalais's
Surprise

M

married in the chapel of the Palais Royal before an audience of carefully chosen Court favorites. ^{adame} However, despite the exclusive criteria for admission, Raoul, faithful to his promise, contrived to get an invitation

for Malicorne, who was eager to see the curious spectacle.

Once they were both inside, Raoul approached de Guiche, who, belying his splendid clothes, wore an expression of such misery that only the face of the Duke of Buckingham could match him for dejection and despair. "Watch yourself, Count," said Raoul, gently warning his friend just as the archbishop was blessing the bride and groom. In fact, the Prince de Condé was visibly taking note of these twin statues of sorrow, standing like sad caryatids on either side of the nave. The count made an effort to get hold of himself.

When the ceremony was over, the king and the queen progressed into the large salon, where they were to be introduced to Madame and her suite. It was remarked that the king, who seemed quite taken with his new sister-in-law, reserved his most sincere compliments for her.

It was also remarked that Queen Mother Anne, after fixing Buckingham

with a long and searching look, leaned toward Madame de Motteville* and said, "Don't you think he resembles his father?"

Others remarked that Monsieur looked anxiously at everyone and seemed unhappy with everything.

After the reception of the princes and ambassadors, Monsieur asked permission of the king to present to him, as well as to Madame, the new members of his now expanded household.

"Do you know, Viscount," the Prince de Condé asked Raoul in a low voice, "if the household has been selected by a person of taste, and if we'll see any faces worth looking at?"

"I have no idea, Monseigneur," replied Raoul.

"Ha! That's hard to believe."

"Why so, Monseigneur?"

"Because you're close friends with de Guiche, one of the prince's favorites."

“Quite so, Monseigneur, but as I have no interest in the subject, I never asked him about it, and since I never asked him, he never told me.”

“What about Manicamp?”

“It’s true, Manicamp was with us at Le Havre and on the road here, but I didn’t speak to him about it any more than I did to de Guiche. Besides, why would he know? He’s not exactly a noble of the first rank.”

“Really, my dear Viscount, is that what you think?” said the prince. “In matters like this, it’s people of the second rank who are the movers and shakers. I think you’ll find that Monsieur de Manicamp arranged everything with de Guiche, and de Guiche got it accepted by Monsieur.”

“Well, Monseigneur, I really had no idea,” said Raoul, “and I’m grateful to Your Highness for the lesson I had the honor to receive.”

“I’m willing to believe that, incredible though it is. Anyway, it won’t be long before we find out: here

comes *the Flying Squadron, as Queen Catherine used to call them.* 77
Tudieu! What lovely faces!"

A troop of young ladies was advancing into the hall under the direction of Madame de Navailles,* and it must be said that their appearance was a triumph for Manicamp, if in fact he deserved the credit for their selection afforded him by the Prince de Condé. Even at first glance they were a delight to those who, like Monsieur le Prince, were connoisseurs of beauty. A young blond woman of perhaps twenty or twenty-one years of age led the way, and was the first to be introduced: "Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente,"* announced old Madame de Navailles.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente," repeated Monsieur, bowing to Madame.

"Oh ho!" said the prince, leaning toward Raoul. "She's certainly attractive enough."

"She is pretty, in fact," said Raoul, "though a trifle haughty."

“Oh, we know those country airs, Viscount; less than three months will see her tamed. But look, here’s another beauty.”

“Indeed,” said Raoul, “and a beauty I know myself.”

“Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais,” said Madame de Navailles.

Name and surname were scrupulously repeated by Monsieur.

“Good God!” cried Raoul, staring at the doorway into the hall, eyes wide.

“What is it?” asked the prince. “Is it Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais that makes you call on God?”

“No, Monseigneur, no,” replied Raoul, suddenly pale and trembling.

“If it isn’t Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, it must be this charming blond who follows her. Lovely eyes, my faith! Too thin by half, but charming!”

“Mademoiselle de La Baume Le

Blanc de La Vallière," said Madame de Navailles.

As that name resounded in the depths of Raoul's heart, he felt a clutch in his chest and a cloud rose before his eyes. For long moments he saw and heard nothing, and Monsieur le Prince, suddenly finding himself without an audience for his commentary, left him to get a closer look at the young ladies.

"Louise, here! Louise, a maid of honor to Madame!" murmured Raoul. And his eyes, as if seeking an explanation, wandered from Louise to Montalais. The latter had already abandoned her pretended shyness, having worn a demure expression just long enough to get her through the presentation and courtesies. Mademoiselle de Montalais had perched herself on a corner from which she could observe the entire company with amusement, and having spotted Raoul, she was enjoying the lovelorn cavalier's profound astonishment at the presence of herself and her friend.

Raoul tried to avoid the mutinous, mischievous, mocking looks that put him through the wringer, but, desperate for an explanation, he kept helplessly turning back to her.

As for Louise, either from timidity or some other reason Raoul couldn't account for, she kept her eyes downcast. Dazzled, intimidated, breathing quickly and shallowly, she withdrew as far as she could into the background, ignoring even Montalais's insistent elbows.

For Raoul, all of this was a deep mystery, the solution to which the poor viscount would have given a great deal. But no one was there to give it to him, not even Malicorne, who, anxious at finding himself among so many gentlemen of high rank, and spooked by Montalais's mocking glances, had drifted to the outside. Making the circuit, he eventually found himself within a few steps of Monsieur le Prince, behind the collected maids of honor and almost within the sound of Mademoiselle Aure's voice, a planet

around which, like a humble satellite, he seemed fated to orbit.

Regaining his self-possession, Raoul thought he recognized some voices to his left. In fact, it was de Wardes, de Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine, in quiet conversation, talking so low one could hardly hear the breath of their words in that vast hall. To speak quietly but clearly in this place, maintaining a posture of attention without leaning or looking toward one's interlocutor, was a skill achieved by only the most talented of courtiers. It took some attention and study to pick out the thread of conversation between these three who otherwise appeared to be statues. In fact, in that audience before the king and queens, apparently listening raptly to Their Majesties, there were a number of such conversations surreptitiously under way in which deference and respect were not the dominant notes. But Raoul was experienced in this mode of conversation, and even when he couldn't quite hear the words, he could often read the meaning from

the movements of their lips.

“Who is this Montalais?” asked de Wardes. “What are we to make of this La Vallière? Have the provinces come to Paris?”

“I know this Montalais,” said the Chevalier de Lorraine. “She’s a clever girl who will amuse the Court. La Vallière is likewise charming, though a trifle lame.”

“Ugh!” said de Wardes.

“Don’t count her out, de Wardes; there are some very spicy Latin sayings about ladies who are lame.”

“Messieurs, Messieurs,” said de Guiche, glancing anxiously at Raoul, “a little restraint, if you please.”

But the count’s anxiety seemed misplaced, for Raoul’s expression remained calm and indifferent, though he hadn’t missed a word of what had been said. He was recording the insolence and insults of the two provocateurs for later settlement.

However, de Wardes seemed to

guess his thoughts, and said, "Who, then, are these ladies' lovers?"

"Do you mean Montalais?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, Montalais—for starters."

"Who? Why, you, me, de Guiche ... anyone!"

"And ... the other?"

"Mademoiselle de La Vallière?"

"Yes."

"Hush, Messieurs," hissed de Guiche, to cut off the chevalier's answer. "Hush, Madame is listening to us."

Raoul thrust his clenched right hand into his doublet, where it tore at the laces of his shirt. But this casual malice toward these young women drove him to a sudden decision. "Poor Louise," he said to himself, "has certainly come here for an honorable purpose under honorable protection—but I must know this purpose, and who protects her." Then,

imitating Malicorne's maneuver, he casually sidled toward the group of maids of honor.

Soon the formal presentation was complete. The king, who had never ceased looking at and admiring Madame, left the reception hall with the two queens.

The Chevalier de Lorraine resumed his place beside Monsieur, and while in his company dripped into his ear a few drops of the poison he'd brewed over the past hour while looking at the new faces at Court and suspecting that some of them might have happiness in their hearts. The king, when leaving, had been followed by some of his entourage, but those of his courtiers who professed independence or cultivated gallantry remained behind and approached the young ladies. Monsieur le Prince complimented Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, while Buckingham paid court to *Madame de Chalais and Madame de La Fayette*, 78 ladies of whom Madame was already fond. As for the

Comte de Guiche, abandoning Monsieur until he could approach Madame alone, he was talking animatedly with Madame de Valentinois, his sister, and *Mesdemoiselles de Créquy and de Châtillon.* 79

Alone in the midst of all this political and amorous socializing was Malicorne, who wanted only to spirit Montalais away, but she preferred conversing with Raoul, if only to parry his questions and savor his surprise. Raoul had gone straight to Mademoiselle de La Vallière and greeted her with the most profound respect. Seeing him, Louise only blushed and stammered, so Montalais had come to her rescue. “Well!” she said. “Here we are, Monsieur le Vicomte.”

“So I see,” said Raoul, smiling, “and your being here is just what I’m hoping you’ll explain.”

Malicorne approached, wearing his most charming smile. “Not so near, Monsieur Malicorne,” warned

Montalais. “Really, you’re very indiscreet.”

Malicorne pursed his lips and withdrew several steps without saying a word. But his expression changed from pleasant to the mocking smile of a jester.

“You’d like an explanation, Monsieur Raoul?” asked Montalais.

“Yes, I think one is in order; I mean, Mademoiselle de La Vallière a maid of honor to Madame!”

“And why shouldn’t she, or I, be a maid of honor?” asked Montalais.

“Please accept my congratulations, Mesdemoiselles,” sighed Raoul, who could see he wasn’t going to get a direct answer.

“That didn’t sound very congratulatory, Monsieur le Vicomte,” said Montalais.

“It didn’t?”

“Don’t you agree, my lady?” she asked Louise.

“Maybe Monsieur de Bragelonne thinks the appointment is a-below my condition,” stammered Louise.

“Oh, not at all, Mademoiselle!” Raoul quickly replied. “You know I don’t feel that way—I think you’re worthy to be not just a maid of honor, but a queen! I’m just surprised I didn’t learn of it till today.”

“True enough,” said Montalais, in her usual teasing tone. “You didn’t know about it, and there’s no reason why you should have. Monsieur de Bragelonne had written you four letters, Louise, but there was no one in Blois to receive them but your mother, and those letters couldn’t be allowed to fall into her hands, so I had them intercepted and returned to Monsieur Raoul. Thus, he thought you were in Blois and was unaware you were actually in Paris, rising to your new level of dignity.”

“What? You didn’t notify Monsieur Raoul as I’d asked you?” gasped Louise.

“Why would I? So he could

moralize, and meddle, and ruin everything we'd worked so hard to achieve? Certainly not!"

"Am I really that bad?" asked Raoul.

"Yes," said Montalais, "and anyway, this way suited me better. I was bound for Paris, you were nowhere around, and Louise wept bitterly, interpret that however you like. I asked my sponsor, who had gotten me my appointment, to get one for Louise, and the appointment arrived. Louise went ahead to Paris to order her new wardrobe, but I stayed behind because I already had my clothes; I received your letters and had them returned to you, adding a word or two promising you a surprise. Your surprise, my dear Monsieur, is right here, and I think she looks fine, so don't ask for anything more from me.

"Now come, Monsieur Malicorne, it's time that we left these two young people alone, as I'm sure they have a lot to say to each other. You may take

my hand, Monsieur Malicorne, and I hope you appreciate the honor.”

“One moment, Mademoiselle,” said Raoul, halting the young lady in her flight, and speaking in a serious tone in sharp contrast to that of Montalais. “Your pardon, but could I please know the name of this sponsor? For if this sponsor lends you his protection, as he might for many reasons”—and he bowed—“then it seems to me that Mademoiselle de La Vallière should have a protector as well.”

“Good Lord, Monsieur Raoul,” Louise said naively, “that’s simple enough, and I don’t see why I shouldn’t tell you myself; my sponsor was Monsieur Malicorne.”

Raoul stood speechless for a moment, wondering if he were still being teased, then turned to speak to Malicorne. But he was already far away and being driven farther by Montalais.

Mademoiselle de La Vallière moved as if to follow her friend, but Raoul restrained her with gentle

authority. "A word, Louise, I beg of you," he said.

"But, Monsieur Raoul," said Louise, blushing, "we're alone here, everyone else is leaving. They'll be looking for me."

"Don't worry about that," said the young man, smiling. "Neither of us are so important that our absence will be noticed."

"But my duties, Monsieur Raoul?"

"Fear not, Mademoiselle, I know the customs of the Court; your duties don't start until tomorrow, so you have a few minutes to answer the questions I have the honor to ask you."

"Monsieur Raoul, you're so very serious," said Louise, agitated.

"Because the circumstances are serious, Mademoiselle. Will you listen to me?"

"I'm listening, Monsieur, but I must repeat, we're very alone here."

“You’re right,” said Raoul. And, offering her his hand, he led the young woman to the gallery of the reception hall, where the windows looked out over the courtyard. Everyone still in the hall was hurrying to the middle window, which opened onto a balcony from which one could see the departures of those of high rank. Raoul went to one of the side windows, where it was just the two of them, and said, “Louise, you know that since childhood I’ve loved you like a sister; you’ve been the confidante of all my sorrows and the object of all my hopes.”

“Yes,” she quietly replied. “Yes, Monsieur Raoul, I know that.”

“And on your side, you’ve always showed me the same friendship, the same confidence. Why, in this new matter, have you not confided in me? Why have you shut me out?”

La Vallière made no answer.

“I thought you loved me,” said Raoul, voice beginning to tremble. “I thought you agreed to all our shared

plans for happiness together, the plans we made walking the trails of Cour-Cheverny and under the poplars that line the lane that leads to Blois. You have no answer, Louise?" He paused. "Can it be," he asked, nearly choking, "that you no longer love me?"

"I didn't say that," Louise replied, almost whispering.

"Oh, tell me the truth, I beg you! All the hopes I have in life are centered on you, for you've always been so true, so sweet, so simple. Please don't be dazzled by the Court, Louise, now that you're in the middle of it, here where all purity is corrupted, and all youth succumbs to age. Cover your ears, Louise, to avoid hearing their words, close your eyes against their seductions, close even your lips so as not to breathe in the corrupting air! Now, without falsehood, without evasion, tell me, Louise: should I believe Mademoiselle de Montalais? Louise, did you come to Paris because I no longer came to Blois?"

La Vallière blushed and buried her face in her hands.

“That’s it, isn’t it?” cried Raoul, exalted. “That is why you came! Oh, I love you as I’ve never loved you before! Oh, thank you, Louise, for your devotion! But now that you’re here, I must protect you from the shadow of insult, be your shield against all dishonor. Louise, a maid of honor to a young princess, at a Court of loose morals and inconstant love, such a maid is always a target of attacks unless she has a defense. It’s an untenable position; to be respected, you must be married.”

“M-married?”

“Yes.”

“My God!”

“Here is my hand, Louise; take it.”

“But ... your father?”

“My father allows me the freedom to make my choice.”

“Even so....”

“I understand your hesitation, Louise; I’ll consult my father.”

“Oh, Monsieur Raoul, reconsider. Wait.”

“Wait? Impossible. Reconsider? About you, Louise? That would be an insult to you, unbearable. I’m the master of my own fate, and my father will consent, I promise you. Take my hand now, don’t make me wait, or I might think that to change your nature it took only a single step into the palace, one breath of royal favor, a single smile from the queen, or a mere glance from the king.”

As Raoul uttered that final word La Vallière turned as pale as death, perhaps from fear at seeing the young man so agitated. Whatever the reason, with a movement as quick as thought, she placed her two hands between those of Raoul. Then she turned and ran away without speaking another syllable, while Raoul’s whole body shuddered from the touch of her hands. He took her brief touch as an oath, a solemn oath wrung from her

virginal timidity by pure love.

XL

The

Consent of

Athos

Royal with urgent intentions that called for action without delay. He went to the courtyard, mounted his horse, and took the road to Blois, while behind him the marriage of Monsieur and the Princess of England was celebrated with joy by the courtiers and sorrow by de Guiche and Buckingham.

Raoul rode hard and arrived at Blois after eighteen hours, having spent the journey preparing his arguments. A fever is also an argument, one to which there is no reply, and Raoul had a fever.

Athos was in his study adding a few pages to *his memoirs* 80 when Raoul was brought in by Grimaud. At a glance, the astute nobleman saw something extraordinary in his son's expression. "You seem to have come on a matter of great consequence," he said, embracing Raoul and then urging him toward a chair.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the young man, "and I beg you to listen with that kind attention which has never failed me."

"Speak, Raoul."

"Monsieur, with a man like you I can go straight to the facts of the matter: Mademoiselle de La Vallière is now in Paris in the capacity of maid of honor to Madame. I've thought hard about this, I love Mademoiselle de La Vallière above all

else, and it is against my principles to leave her undefended in a position where her reputation and virtue are vulnerable. I wish to marry her, Monsieur, and I've come to ask for your consent to this marriage."

Throughout this speech, Athos had maintained a cool and silent reserve. Raoul had begun his speech with cool self-possession, but his emotion had risen with every word.

Athos regarded Raoul with a look both profound and veiled with a certain sadness. "So, you've thought about this?" he asked.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I believe you're aware of how I feel about such an alliance."

"I know, Monsieur," Raoul replied, very low, "but you said that if I insisted...."

"Do you insist?"

Raoul stuttered a few words in which only yes was intelligible.

“In fact, Monsieur,” continued Athos quietly, “your passion must be strong for you to persist in desiring this union despite my opposition.”

Raoul passed a trembling hand across his forehead to wipe away the sweat bursting from his brow.

Athos looked at him and pity filled his heart. He rose and said, “Very well, my feelings in the matter are nothing, since they differ from yours. If you want something from me, it’s yours. What can I give you?”

“Your indulgence, Monsieur, I need no more than that,” said Raoul, grasping his hands.

“You underestimate my feelings for you, Raoul,” said the count. “There’s more for you in my heart than mere indulgence.”

Raoul lifted his hands and kissed them like the most passionate lover.

“Come, come,” said Athos. “Tell me, Raoul, what must I sign?”

“Oh, nothing, Monsieur, nothing—

only, it would be good if you could take the trouble to write to the king and ask His Majesty, to whom I belong, for his permission for me to marry Mademoiselle de La Vallière."

"In fact, that's a fine idea, Raoul, for after me, or even before me, you have a master in the king, and it's your loyal duty to ask permission of both these masters."

"Oh, Monsieur!"

"I'll accede to your request this very moment, Raoul." The count approached the window, leaned out, and called, "Grimaud!"

Grimaud's head appeared beneath an arbor of jasmine he was pruning. "My horses!" called the count.

"What does this mean, Monsieur?" asked Raoul.

"That we leave within two hours."

"For where?"

"For Paris."

“For Paris! Are you coming to Paris?”

“Isn’t the king in Paris?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, then, isn’t that where we need to go? Are you befuddled?”

“But, Monsieur,” said Raoul, overwhelmed by this paternal zeal, “wouldn’t a simple letter do just as well?”

“You exaggerate my importance, Raoul; it wouldn’t do for a simple gentleman like me to write a letter to the king. I should make such a request of His Majesty personally, and that’s what I mean to do. We’ll go together, Raoul.”

“Oh, Monsieur! You’re too kind!”

“How do things stand with His Majesty?”

“You mean, regarding me, Monsieur?”

“Yes.”

“Oh! Very well indeed.”

“You know this for a fact?”

“I heard it from his own lips.”

“On what occasion?”

“Upon being commended by Monsieur d’Artagnan in connection with an affair in the Place de Grève when I had the honor of drawing my sword on His Majesty’s behalf. I have reason to believe, therefore, that His Majesty thinks well of me.”

“All the better!”

“But please, don’t be so distant and formal with me,” continued Raoul. “Don’t make me regret being overcome by these powerful emotions.”

“To ask me again, Raoul, is quite unnecessary. You requested my formal consent, I agreed, you have it, and there’s no need to speak further about it. Now, Raoul, come see my new additions to the gardens.”

The young man knew that once the

will of the count had been spoken, there was no arguing with it. He lowered his head and followed his father to the gardens. Athos slowly led him around, pointing out recent grafts, green shoots, and new-laid paths. Raoul found the count's calm demeanor increasingly unsettling; the love that filled his heart felt so immense that the world could hardly contain it. How could the heart of Athos be so empty and closed to it? Finally, Bragelonne, unable to contain himself any longer, burst out, "Monsieur, there must be some hidden reason for you to disapprove of Mademoiselle de La Vallière! She's so good, so sweet, so pure, that your nature, so wise and just, should appreciate her many virtues. In the name of heaven, tell me, is there between our families some secret enmity, some hereditary hatred?"

"Look, Raoul, at this beautiful bed of lilies of the valley," said Athos. "See how well the light and moisture of this spot suit it, under the shade of this sycamore, whose canopy protects it from the direct heat of the sun

while allowing its warmth to pass through.”

Raoul stopped, biting his lips, and then, feeling the blood pounding in his temples, plucked up his courage to say, “Monsieur, give me an explanation, I implore you. You can’t possibly forget that your son is also a man.”

“Then prove you’re a man,” said Athos, drawing himself up stiffly, “for you refuse to act like a son. I implored you to await the arrangement of an illustrious alliance; I would have found you a wife from the highest ranks of the nobility, for I wanted you to shine with the double glory of wealth and family. By your heritage you deserve no less.”

“Yet, Monsieur,” cried Raoul, carried away by a sudden pang, “the other day, I was mocked for not knowing my mother’s name.”

Athos turned pale; then, frowning like the God of the Old Testament, he said majestically, “I can scarcely wait to hear how you replied, Monsieur.”

“Oh! Forgive me!” murmured the young man, plunging from outrage to agony.

“How did you reply, Monsieur?” asked the count, with a stamp of his foot.

“Monsieur, I instantly drew my sword, he who insulted me came on guard, I flung his sword over a fence and threw him after it.”

“And why didn’t you kill him?”

“His Majesty forbids us to duel, Monsieur, and at that moment I was His Majesty’s ambassador.”

“Very well,” said Athos, “that’s just one more reason for me to talk to the king.”

“What else are you going to ask of him, Monsieur?”

“Permission to draw my sword against he who has offended us.”

“Monsieur, if I didn’t do what I should have, forgive me, I beg of you.”

“I’ve not blamed you for anything, Raoul.”

“But this permission you want to ask of the king....”

“Raoul, I will ask His Majesty to personally sign your marriage contract.”

“Monsieur....”

“But on one condition.”

“A condition, Monsieur, with me? Just give me an order and I’ll obey it.”

“On condition,” continued Athos, “that you tell me the name of he who has spoken so about your mother.”

“But, Monsieur, why do you need to know his name? The insult was against me, and once His Majesty grants his permission, it’s on me to avenge it.”

“His name, Monsieur?”

“I won’t allow you to risk yourself!”

“Do you take me for a Don Diego

81 who would let another avenge him? His name!”

“You demand it?”

“I... wish it.”

“The Comte de Wardes.”

“Ah!” said Athos serenely. “Very good; I know him. But our horses are ready, Monsieur, so instead of leaving in two hours, we leave immediately. To horse, Monsieur—to horse!”

XLI

Monsieur is Jealous of the **D**uke of Buckingham

W

de La Fere was on his way to Paris with Raoul, the Palais Royal was the site of a scene so comical not even **Molière** 82 could have improved upon it.

It was four days after the

marriage. Madame had taken breakfast in her rooms, while Monsieur, having eaten hastily in his own, marched into his outer chambers, lips pouting, brows contracted.

Monsieur's morning meal had not been cheerful. He'd dined with a small entourage, just the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp sharing his breakfast, which lasted three quarters of an hour without a single word spoken between them. Manicamp, less familiar with the moods of His Royal Highness than the chevalier, tried vainly to read the prince's looks to figure out what was making him so sullen. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who wondered at nothing because he knew everything, ate with the hearty appetite he had when enjoying others' sorrows, savoring both Monsieur's spite and Manicamp's stress. He took pleasure in keeping everyone at the table, continuing to eat though the prince was obviously impatient to be away. Sometimes Monsieur regretted that he'd become so close with the chevalier that

Lorraine was exempted from all etiquette. He was having one of those regrets now, but he feared the chevalier's temper as much as he loved his company, so he settled for silently seething. He would stare up at the ceiling, then lower his eyes to glare at the slices of pâté the chevalier was attacking, until eventually, not daring to say what he thought, he gestured in a pantomime of frustration that would have been the envy of Harlequin.

Finally, Monsieur could stand it no longer, and during the fruit course he stood up angrily and went off in a huff, leaving the Chevalier de Lorraine to finish his breakfast however he saw fit. Manicamp, seeing Monsieur get up, rose awkwardly, napkin in his hand. He watched as Monsieur dashed rather than walked out into the antechamber, where, finding a footman, he gave him an order in a low voice. Then, turning aside so as not to go back through the breakfast room, he passed through his chambers and went out, intending to seek out the queen

mother in her oratory, where she usually was at this time. It was about ten o'clock in the morning.

Anne of Austria was writing when Monsieur entered. The queen mother was very fond of her younger son, who was sweet-faced and affectionate. Compared to the king, Monsieur was gentler with her, almost effeminate. He always treated his mother with those little considerations that women find endearing. Anne of Austria would have loved to have had a daughter but found in this son the attentiveness and docility of a child of twelve. Monsieur spent his time with his mother admiring her famously lovely arms, giving her his opinion on powder and advice on perfumes, which she very much enjoyed. He kissed her hands and forehead with a charming innocence, and always had some sweetmeat to offer her and some new fashion to recommend.

Anne of Austria loved the king, or rather she loved the principle of

royalty her eldest son represented, the divine right of kings to rule. To the king, Anne was the queen mother—but to Philippe, she was solely a mother. And he knew that, of all shelters, the mother's bosom was the sweetest and safest. As a small child, he would take refuge there whenever storms raged between he and his brother; and after the squalling insults that constituted the crime of juvenile *lèse-majesté*, after the scuffles when the king and his rebellious subject fought in their night-shirts over a disputed bed with their valet La Porte* as referee, Philippe, victorious but terrified by his victory, would flee to his mother for aid, or at least the assurance of a pardon, which Louis XIV grudgingly granted. Anne had succeeded, by this habit of peaceful intercession, in reconciling all her sons' disputes and at the same time sharing in all their secrets. The king, a little jealous of the maternal solicitude that favored his brother, often behaved more submissively to Anne of Austria than was consistent with his character.

Anne of Austria practiced this same policy toward Marie-Thérèse,* the young queen. She reigned like a despot over the king's household and was already arranging her forces to exert a similar rule over that of her younger son. Anne of Austria was almost proud when she saw someone come to her with a long face, pale cheeks, and red eyes, aware that by lending her aid to the weakest or most rebellious members of the house, she was strengthening her own hold.

She was writing in her oratory, as we said, when Monsieur entered, not with pale cheeks or red eyes, but anxious, spiteful, and irritated. He kissed his mother's hand distractedly and sat down before she gave him permission. Given the rigid etiquette enforced in Anne of Austria's presence, this lapse was clear evidence of disorder, especially in Philippe, usually so meticulous in his respectful adulation. He wouldn't violate propriety in that way without serious cause.

“What’s wrong, Philippe?” asked Anne of Austria, turning to her youngest son.

“Ah, Mother! So many things,” murmured the prince dolefully.

“You do look like a man with many things on his mind,” said the queen, putting the pen down on her writing desk.

Philippe frowned, but said nothing.

“In all those things on your mind,” said Anne of Austria, “there must be one that occupies you more than the others.”

“Yes, Mother, there is indeed one thing that concerns me most of all.”

“I’m listening to you.”

Philippe opened his mouth to release all the grievances fighting to make their way out. But he closed his mouth again, heart full, and could only breathe a sigh.

“Come, Philippe, show some resolve,” said the queen mother.

“When we have such complaints on our mind, there’s almost always someone to complain about, isn’t there?”

“I don’t disagree, Mother.”

“Then who do you wish to complain about? Come now, pull yourself together.”

“In truth, Mother, what I have to say is very confidential.”

“Really? Mon Dieu!”

“Yes, because it involves a woman....”

“Oh? You wish to speak about Madame Henrietta?” asked the queen mother with eager curiosity.

“About Madame?”

“About your wife, in fact.”

“Yes. Yes, that’s it.”

“Well! If it’s about Madame that you wish to speak to me, my son, don’t be embarrassed. I’m your mother, and next to that Madame is

to me little more than a stranger. However, as she is my daughter-in-law, I'm obliged to listen with interest for your sake—so tell me all."

"In that case, Mother, admit that you've ... noticed something," said Philippe.

"Noticed something? That's scary but vague. What kind of something?"

"Madame is pretty, I think."

"Indeed."

"But not quite a beauty."

"No, but she's still maturing, and has time yet to bloom. You've already seen what a change a few years have made in her looks. Well, she will bloom—she's only sixteen. Why, at fifteen I myself was somewhat too slender, but Madame is already rather pretty."

"Which means she attracts attention."

"Quite so, a pretty woman is always noticed, the more so when

she's a princess."

"She was brought up well, wasn't she?"

"Her mother, Queen Henriette, is a trifle cold and pretentious, but her heart is in the right place. The young princess's education may have been somewhat neglected, but her principles seem proper enough. That at least was my opinion of her during her sojourn in France; I don't know what might have happened since her return to England."

"What could have happened?"

"Who can say? But some heads, if they're frivolous, are easily turned by sudden prosperity."

"That's the word exactly, Mother. Frivolous! That sums her up."

"It's not that simple, Philippe. She has wit, and a certain coquettishness quite natural in a pretty woman—and in a young lady of rank at Court, that flaw becomes an advantage. A charming young princess usually

gathers a brilliant crowd around her; her smile excites dash and rivalry among the ardent cavaliers, and the nobles will fight with fervor for a prince who has a pretty wife.”

“Oh, a thousand thanks, Mother!” Philippe said tartly. “You paint a pretty picture—I think not!”

“How so?” asked the queen with pretended naïveté.

“You know, Mother, how reluctant I was to marry,” said Philippe. “And now....”

“Ah, you begin to alarm me. Do you have a serious grievance against Madame?”

“I wouldn’t say ... serious.”

“Then put aside this long face. If you go around your house looking like this, people will take you for an unhappy husband.”

“In fact,” replied Philippe, “I am an unhappy husband, and I don’t care who knows it.”

“Philippe! Philippe!”

“Faith, Mother, to be quite honest, I don’t understand this new life and how I’m supposed to live it.”

“Explain yourself.”

“My wife doesn’t seem to belong to me, she’s always somewhere else. In the morning there are callers, and clothiers, and correspondence, and in the evening it’s off to dances and concerts.”

“Philippe! You’re jealous!”

“Me? God forbid! I’ll leave the stupid role of jealous husband to others. But I am ... vexed.”

“Philippe, you can’t reproach a wife for such innocent behaviors as those. If that’s all you have to complain about....”

“But listen, a wife, however innocent, can still make one anxious. There are certain visitors, over-frequent and over-familiar, who can make even the least jealous husband apprehensive.”

“Ah, now we’re getting to it. Over-frequent and over-familiar, is it? It took you half an hour, but at last you’ve come to the point.”

“Well ... yes.”

“This might be serious. So, you think Madame might be giving you cause to worry about her behavior?”

“Precisely.”

“Really? After only four days of marriage, you think your wife might be straying on you? Take care not to exaggerate, Philippe—you can’t accuse a person of something if you can prove nothing.”

The prince, abashed by his mother’s serious tone, tried to reply but just stammered a few disconnected syllables.

“You have nothing to say,” said Anne of Austria. “Because there’s nothing to it.”

“Not so!” cried Philippe. “There is something, and I’ll prove it. I said too frequent, didn’t I? And too familiar?

Well, listen.”

Anne of Austria prepared herself to hear the kind of juicy gossip that every woman, even a mother and a queen, is eager to savor, especially if it’s about the dependents in her household.

“All right!” said Philippe. “First of all, explain one thing to me.”

“What?”

“Why does my wife still maintain an English entourage? Eh?” Philippe crossed his arms and regarded his mother with an air of triumph, as if she couldn’t possibly have a response to this complaint.

“But that’s quite simple,” said Anne of Austria. “The English are her compatriots, they spent a great deal of money to escort her to France, and it would be impolite, not to mention impolitic, to abruptly dismiss noblemen who haven’t stinted at any devotion or sacrifice.”

“Right, Mother, some sacrifice to

leave behind an ugly land and come to this beautiful country, where you can get more and better for a single crown than you can get anywhere else for four. And as for devotion, why not travel a hundred leagues with a woman you love?"

"Love, Philippe, really? Do you know what you're saying!"

"Yes, parbleu!"

"And who is in love with Madame?"

"That too-handsome Duke of Buckingham. Are you going to defend him, Mother?"

Anne of Austria simultaneously smiled and blushed. The name Buckingham stirred up memories both sweet and sad. "The Duke of Buckingham?" she whispered.

"Yes, one of those boudoir knights, as my grandfather Henri IV used to call them."

"The Buckinghams are loyal and brave," said Anne of Austria stoutly.

“Oh, this is too much! My mother takes the side of my wife’s lover against me!” cried Philippe, voice breaking and eyes filling with tears.

“Son! Oh! Son!” cried Anne of Austria. “Such talk is unworthy of you! Your wife has no lover, and even if she did, it wouldn’t be Monsieur de Buckingham—the men of his blood are loyal and discreet, I tell you. Hospitality is sacred to them!”

“Really, Mother?” sniffed Philippe. “Monsieur de Buckingham is an Englishman. Are the English really that respectful of the marital rights of French princes?”

Anne blushed again, this time to her hairline. She turned aside as if to pick up her pen from her writing desk, but really to conceal her color from the eyes of her son. “Truly, Philippe,” she said, “you know too well how to find words that disturb me—but your anger blinds you as much as it alarms me. Take a breath and consider!”

“Mother, I don’t need to consider—

I see.”

“And what do you see?”

“I see that Monsieur de Buckingham never leaves my wife’s side. He dares to give her gifts, and she dares to accept them. Yesterday she mentioned violet sachets; our French perfumers can’t get them, as you know so well, Mother, who’ve asked for them so many times in vain. Our perfumers can’t reproduce that scent. Well! The duke was wearing just such a violet sachet, and shortly thereafter my wife was wearing it.”

“Really, Monsieur,” said Anne of Austria, “you’re building pyramids out of pebbles; take care. What harm, I ask you, is there in passing along a perfume to a fellow compatriot? These strange suspicions remind me all too much of your father, who made me suffer so unjustly.”

“Monsieur de Buckingham’s father was probably more discreet and respectful than his son,” said Philippe, unaware how his words lanced his mother’s heart.

The queen turned pale and pressed a hand to her bosom, but recovering quickly she said, "Well, do you intend to do anything about it?"

"Absolutely."

"Tell me your intentions."

"I intend, Mother, to complain loudly about it. I tell you, I will endure nothing from this Monsieur de Buckingham."

"You will endure nothing?"

"Nothing."

"What will you do?"

"I will complain to the king."

"And do you expect the king to respond?"

"If he does not," said Monsieur, with a fierce expression at odds with the usual softness of his features, "well, I will see justice done myself!"

"What justice would that be?" asked Anne of Austria, with an edge of alarm.

“I would have Monsieur de Buckingham leave Madame; in fact, I would have Monsieur de Buckingham leave France; and I will inform him that such is my will.”

“You will do no such thing, Philippe,” said the queen. “If you do, and thereby violate our royal hospitality, I’ll see to it that the king treats you most severely.”

“You threaten me, my own mother!” cried Philippe, tears starting from his eyes. “You threaten me if I complain!”

“I don’t oppose you, I oppose your anger. I tell you that to take such steps against Monsieur de Buckingham, or against any Englishman, even in a personal matter, will drag France and England into a painful clash. What! Is a Prince of France, the brother to the king, unable to ignore a slight, or even an insult, in the face of political necessity? For shame.”

Philippe shrugged sullenly.

“Besides,” continued the queen, “this imagined insult isn’t true or even possible, it’s just ridiculous jealousy.”

“I know what I know.”

“Whatever you think you know, I must urge you to patience.”

“I’m not a patient man, Mother.”

The queen rose with stiff hauteur. “Then explain your demands.”

“I make no demands, Mother, but I do have desires. If Monsieur de Buckingham will not, of his own accord, stay away from my house, I will forbid his admittance.”

“This is a matter we will refer to the king,” said Anne of Austria, her voice nearly choking as her heart swelled within her.

“Please,” cried Philippe, clasping his hands before her, “as your son, I beg you, act as my mother and not as a queen. I can settle this business between myself and Monsieur de Buckingham with a few brief words.”

“It is exactly those words that I forbid you to say, Monsieur,” said the queen, recovering her authority. “It is beneath you.”

“So be it, then! Instead of talking to him, I’ll talk to Madame.”

“Never,” said Anne of Austria, the past rising before her eyes. “Never tyrannize your wife, my son. Never command her from on high; a wife conquered in that way is never convinced.”

“Then what am I to do? I’ll have to ask my friends.”

“Your council of hypocrites, with your Chevalier de Lorraine and your de Wardes? Leave this to me, Philippe. You want the Duke of Buckingham to go away, isn’t that so?”

“As soon as possible, Mother.”

“Well, then! Send the duke to me, my son. But do it smiling, and say nothing to your wife, to the king, or to your so-called friends. In this matter,

listen only to me. Alas! I know what happens to a household when it's troubled by false advisors."

"I will obey, Mother."

"And you'll be glad you did, Philippe. Find me the duke."

"Oh, that won't be hard!"

"Where do you think he is?"

"At Madame's door, of course, waiting to attend *her morning lever*."

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"Very well," said Anne of Austria calmly. "Please tell the duke that I beg him to come and see me."

Philippe kissed his mother's hand and went to find the Duke of Buckingham.

XLII

“Forever!”

Linvitation of the queen mother, presented himself at her chambers a half an hour after the departure of the Lord Buckingham, at the Duc d'Orléans. When his name was announced by the footman, the queen, who'd been leaning on her table, head in her hands, arose and received the duke's gracious and respectful greeting with a smile. Anne of Austria was still beautiful. It's well known that even at her age, now somewhat advanced, her long ashen hair, lovely hands, and rosy lips were still admired by all who saw her. At that moment, enlivened by past memories that

warmed her heart, she was as beautiful as in the days of her youth, when her palace had welcomed the young and passionate father of this later Buckingham, that ill-fated father who had lived for this queen and had died whispering her name.

Now Anne of Austria favored Buckingham with so tender a look one could detect in it both the pleasure of maternal affection and something of the sweet coquetry of a lover.

“Your Majesty wished to speak with me?” asked Buckingham with respect.

“Yes, Duke,” replied the queen in English. “Please take a seat.”

This favor granted to the young man by Anne of Austria, as well as the compliment of addressing him in the language of his country, which the duke had scarcely heard since he’d been in France, moved him to his soul. He immediately guessed that the queen had something to ask of him.

After reverting for a moment to the oppression she'd felt earlier, the queen resumed her smiling demeanor. "Monsieur," she said in French, "how are you finding your stay in France?"

"It's a beautiful place, Madame," replied the duke.

"Have you been here before?"

"Once before, yes, Madame."

"But, like any good Englishman, you prefer England?"

"I prefer my country to France," said the duke, "but if Your Majesty asked me if I'd rather be in London or Paris, I would have to say Paris."

Anne of Austria noted the emotion with which these words were spoken. She said, "I'm told, Milord, that you have a beautiful estate, and live in a rich and ancient palace."

"The palace of my father," said Buckingham, nodding and looking down.

“A place to treasure, and a home of precious memories,” replied the queen, touching, despite herself, on memories of her own that were no less precious.

“In fact,” said the duke, falling under the influence of this melancholy reminiscence, “people of the heart live as much in a reverie of the past as in a dream of the future.”

“That’s true,” said the queen in a low voice. “So, it follows that you, Milord, who are a man of the heart, must soon leave France and return home to your reveries and your relics.”

Buckingham raised his head. “I think not, Madame,” he said.

“How’s that?”

“I think, on the contrary, that I will leave England and come to live in France.”

It was Anne of Austria’s turn to be astonished. “What!” she said. “Are you out of favor with your new king?”

“On the contrary, Madame, His Majesty showers me with benevolence.”

“You can’t have run out of money,” said the queen. “You’re said to have a considerable fortune.”

“My finances, Madame, have never been healthier.”

“Is there some secret reason, then?”

“No, Madame,” said Buckingham, too quickly, “there’s no secret about the reasons for my decision. I’ve loved my time in France, I adore a court ruled by elegance and etiquette, and enjoy these French pleasures that aren’t pursued as seriously in my country.”

Anne of Austria smiled slyly. “Serious pleasures! Have you considered, Monsieur de Buckingham, just how serious they really are?”

The duke stammered something senseless.

“Is there no pleasure so serious,”

continued the queen, "that it would prevent a man of your rank...."

"Madame!" interrupted the duke. "It seems to me Your Majesty makes too much of this."

"Do you think so, Duke?"

"If Your Majesty doesn't mind my saying so, it's strange to extol the attractions of living in England to anyone who has experienced the charms of France."

Anne of Austria approached the young man, placed her beautiful hand on his shoulder, which trembled at her touch, and said, "Milord, believe me, nothing is worth the abandonment of one's country of birth. Time and again I have regretted leaving Spain. I have lived a long life, for a woman, and I must confess that not a year has passed in which I haven't missed Spain."

"Not even one, Madame?" said the duke stiffly. "Not even those years when you reigned as Queen of Beauty, as you still do?"

“Ah, spare me the flattery, Duke. A woman my age could almost ... be your mother.”

She said this in a tone so sweet it touched Buckingham’s heart. “Yes,” she went on, “I could almost be your mother, so I will give you some maternal advice.”

“To advise me to go back to London?” he cried.

“Yes, Milord,” she said.

The duke gasped and clutched his hands to his chest, a gesture that couldn’t fail to move this woman, already inclined toward tender feelings by precious memories. “That’s how it is,” she said.

“What?” he cried. “How can this be? Are you really telling me that I must go, I must exile myself, cut and run?”

“Can you call it exile, Milord? One would think that you considered France your native country.”

“Madame, the country of those

who love is the country of those whom they love.”

“Not one more word, Milord!” said the queen. “You forget to whom you are speaking!”

Buckingham fell to his knees. “Madame, Madame, you are the wellspring of wisdom, of kindness, and of clemency. You are not only the first in this kingdom by rank, but by those divine qualities I spoke of, the first lady in the world. I’ve said nothing, Madame, nothing that deserved so cruel a response. How have I betrayed you?”

“You have betrayed yourself,” said the queen in a low voice.

“I? I’ve said nothing! I’ve done nothing!”

“You forget that you have thought and spoken in the presence of a woman, and more than that....”

“There need be no more!” he interrupted. “No one knows what I’ve spoken of with you.”

“On the contrary, Duke, the matter is known. Such are the flaws and qualities of youth.”

“I must have been betrayed! Denounced!”

“By whom?”

“By those who, as early as at Le Havre, had the infernal perception to read my heart like a book!”

“I don’t know who you mean by that.”

“Monsieur de Bragelonne, for one.”

“I’ve heard the name but don’t know who it belongs to. No, it wasn’t Monsieur de Bragelonne.”

“But who, then, who? Oh, Madame, if someone had the insolence to see in me what I do not wish to be seen....”

“What would you do, Milord?”

“There are secrets that kill those who discover them.”

“He who has discovered your

secret, young fool that you are, is one who cannot be killed by it, and you cannot touch him, for he is within his rights. He is a husband, a jealous husband, and the second man in all France, for he is my son, the Duc d'Orléans."

The duke paled. "Ah, but you are cruel, Madame!" he said.

"You must see, Buckingham," said Anne of Austria sadly, "that you've set yourself up to fight with the clouds when it would be so much easier to turn aside and be at peace."

"But if it is war, then I will die on the battlefield," said the young man gently, his face full of sadness and pain.

Anne reached out to him and took his hand. "Villiers, what is it you're asking?" she said in English, with a vehemence that could not be denied. "Do you ask a mother to sacrifice her son? A queen to dishonor her house? Are you child enough to ask me that? To commit those crimes to spare you some tears, Villiers? You spoke of

one who is dead, but he, at least, was respectful and honorable. If he accepted exile and despair, he did so with a full heart because the order came from his beloved, and death, when it arrived, was a promise of peace that came as a gift or a favor.”

Buckingham rose with a grimace, hands over his heart. “You are right, Madame,” he said, “but the one you speak of had received the order from the mouth of his beloved. He was not expelled, he was asked to leave, and no one mocked him for it.”

“I remember,” whispered Anne of Austria. “But who says you are expelled or exiled? Who says that no one will remember your devotion? I speak on no one’s behalf but mine, Villiers, when I say, ‘Depart!’ Render me this service, grant me this grace, and allow me to owe one more debt to a man of your name.”

“It would be for you, Madame?”

“For me alone.”

“I won’t leave behind a man who

laughs at me, or a prince who says, 'I demanded it.'"

"Duke, listen to me." And here the august features of the aging queen assumed a solemn expression. "I swear that here no one commands but I, and I swear to you that not only will no one laugh or brag, no one will fail to pay you the respect your rank deserves. Count on me, Duke, as I am counting on you."

"But you don't tell me why, Madame, and I'm left angry and in despair. The consolation you offer, sweet and compelling though it may be, isn't enough."

"Dear friend," the queen replied with a gentle smile, "did you know your mother?"

"Alas! Very little, Madame, only as a noble lady who covered me with kisses and tears when I cried."

"Oh, Villiers!" murmured the queen, putting her arm across the young man's shoulder. "I am a mother to you, and believe me, no one will

ever make my son cry.”

“Thank you, Madame, thank you,” said the young man, softened and suffocated by emotion. “It seems there was still room in my heart for a sweeter and more noble feeling than love.”

The queen mother looked tenderly at him and stroked his hand. “Go,” she said.

“When must I go? Command me!”

“The choice of time is yours, Milord,” the queen replied. “You will go, but at the proper moment. So, instead of leaving today, as you might wish, or tomorrow morning, as might be expected, leave tomorrow evening—but announce your departure today as your own will.”

“My... will?” whispered the young man.

“Yes, Duke.”

“And... am I never to return to France?”

Anne of Austria thought for a moment, gravely and sadly. "It would mean much to me," she said, "if you returned on the day I go to my eternal rest in Saint-Denis at the side of my husband, the king."

"Who made you suffer so!" said Buckingham.

"Who was the King of France," replied the queen.

"Madame, you are goodness itself, you live in prosperity and joy, and there are still many years ahead of you."

"Well! Then it might be a while until your return," said the queen, trying to smile.

"I will not return, young though I am," said Buckingham sadly.

"Oh, but God's mercy ...!"

"Death, Madame, is impartial, and pays no attention to age. Some live to old age, but others die young."

"None of these dark thoughts,

Duke. Come, I'll cheer you up—return in two years! I can tell from your features that the feelings that weigh you down today will be gone inside of six months. By the time of your return, they will be long forgotten.”

“I think, Madame, that you judged me better before when you said that the house of Buckingham was a house of dreams and reveries.”

“Hush! Oh, hush!” said the queen, kissing the duke on the forehead with a tenderness she couldn't suppress. “Go! Go now, before you forget yourself further! I am the Queen of France, you are the subject of the King of England, and King Charles awaits you. Adieu, Villiers!” and she added in English, “Villiers, farewell.”

“Forever!” the young man replied.

And he fled, choking back tears. Anne rested her head in her hands, and then looked at her reflection in a mirror. “All in vain,” she murmured. “A woman who has been in love is always, in some corner of her heart, just twenty years old.”

XLIII

In Which
*H*is Majesty
Louis XIV
Finds
Mademoiselle
de La
Vallière

neither Rich
Enough nor
Pretty
Enough for a
Gentleman
of the Rank
of the
Vicomte de
Bragelonne

R La Fère arrived in Paris on the evening of the day in which Buckingham had had his interview with the queen mother. As soon as he arrived, the count sent Raoul to request an audience with the king.

The king had spent part of the day with Madame and the ladies of the Court admiring a shipment of fine Lyon fabric which he had presented to his sister-in-law. That was followed by dinner with the Court and then play at the tables, the king, as usual, leaving the game at eight o'clock to withdraw to his study to work with Monsieur Colbert and Monsieur Fouquet. Raoul entered the antechamber just as the two ministers went out, and the king saw him through the half-opened door. "What do you want, Monsieur de Bragelonne?" he asked.

The young man approached. "An audience, Sire, for the Comte de La

Fère,” he replied, “who has come from Blois with a strong desire to speak to Your Majesty.”

“The card games are over, and I have an hour until supper,” said the king. “Is Monsieur de La Fère ready?”

“Monsieur le Comte is below, awaiting Your Majesty’s orders.”

“Send him up.”

Five minutes later, the count was in the presence of Louis XIV, welcomed by the monarch with that gracious benevolence that Louis, with tact beyond his age, reserved for men who couldn’t be won over with simple favors. “I hope you’ve come to ask me for something, Count,” the king said.

“I won’t hide it from Your Majesty,” replied the count. “I do indeed come with a request.”

“Let’s hear it!” encouraged the king.

“It isn’t anything for me, Sire.”

“Too bad! But if I can’t do something for you, Count, maybe I can for your protégé.”

“Your Majesty gladdens me. As it happens, I do come to speak to the king on the behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne.”

“In that case, Count, it’s the same as speaking for yourself.”

“Not quite, Sire. What I hope to obtain from Your Majesty is of no use to myself. The viscount thinks of marrying.”

“He’s young for that, but no matter. He’s a man of distinction, and I’ll find him a wife to match.”

“He has found one on his own, Sire, and seeks only Your Majesty’s consent.”

“Ah! It’s only a matter of approving a marriage contract?”

Athos bowed.

“And has he chosen a fiancée whose wealth and quality suits you?”

Athos hesitated a moment. "The fiancée is noble enough," he said, "but not wealthy."

"That's an illness for which we have the cure."

"Your Majesty overwhelms me with gratitude—but perhaps he will allow me to make an observation."

"Do, Count."

"Your Majesty proposes to grant this young woman a dowry?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And my visit to the Louvre would be responsible for that? That, Sire, I would regret."

"No false delicacy, Count. What is the fiancée's name?"

"It is," said Athos coolly, "Mademoiselle de La Vallière de La Baume Le Blanc."

"Ah," said the king, searching his memory. "I know that name; there's a Marquis de La Vallière."

“Yes, Sire. This is his daughter.”

“He’s dead?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“And his widow remarried
Monsieur de Saint-Rémy, 84
majordomo to the Dowager
Madame?”

“Your Majesty is well informed.”

“Just so. And I now recall that the
young lady is one of the new maids of
honor to Madame the Younger.”

“Your Majesty knows these matters
better than I do myself.”

The king considered, giving
Athos’s anxious face a sidelong
glance. “Count,” he said, “she’s not
very pretty, this young lady, as I
recall?”

“I couldn’t say,” replied Athos.

“I can, for I saw her, and I wasn’t
struck by her beauty.”

“If not a beauty, Sire, she has a
gentle and modest demeanor.”

“Lovely blond hair, though.”

“Yes.”

“And pretty blue eyes.”

“Quite so.”

“In terms of beauty, then, the match is average. Let’s move on to money.”

“The dowry is fifteen to twenty thousand livres at the most—but the lovers are indifferent to that. I, myself, care little for money.”

“In excess, you mean; a certain amount is a necessity. A lady can’t live at Court on fifteen thousand livres without additional rent from an estate. I’ll take care of that; I want to do it for Bragelonne.”

Athos bowed again, but with, the king noted, a certain coldness. “Let’s move on from money to rank,” said Louis XIV. “Daughter of the Marquis de La Vallière, that’s all very well—but the connection to our worthy Saint-Rémy is unfortunate. I won’t say it ruins the young woman, exactly, but

I know that you, Count, take pride in your house.”

“I, Sire, have pride in nothing but my devotion to Your Majesty.”

The king paused once more. “You know, Monsieur,” he said, “the course of this conversation has surprised me. You come for my approval for a marriage but seem not to approve of it yourself. Now, now, I’m rarely wrong about such things, young as I am, for though I may often choose friendship over wisdom, my innate skepticism enables me to see things clearly. So, I repeat, you don’t approve of your request.”

“Well, Sire—you’re right.”

“Then what’s the problem? Refuse them.”

“No, Sire. I love Bragelonne with all my heart, and he is in love with Mademoiselle de La Vallière. He’s built castles in the air, and I’m not one to crush the illusions of youth. This marriage does displease me, but I implore Your Majesty to approve it

at once and ensure Raoul's happiness."

"Come, Count. Does she love him?"

"If Your Majesty requires me to speak frankly, I don't trust the love of Mademoiselle de La Vallière. She's young, almost a child, dazzled by the Court, and I feel the honor of her service to Madame will turn her head and overcome the tenderness in her heart, and then their marriage will be typical of those Your Majesty sees at Court. But Bragelonne wishes it, and so be it."

"And yet you don't seem like one of those indulgent fathers who is a slave to his children," said the king.

"Sire, I have an iron will to resist the wicked, but none to defy those I love. Raoul suffers and grieves; his thoughts, usually so light, have become heavy and dark. I don't want to deprive Your Majesty of the future services he can render the crown."

"I understand your mind," said the

king, “and above all I understand your heart.”

“In that case,” the count replied, “I need not explain to Your Majesty that above all I desire the happiness of these children, or rather of this child.”

“And like you, I desire Monsieur de Bragelonne’s happiness.”

“Then we needn’t wait for Your Majesty’s signature. Raoul will have the honor to appear before you and receive your immediate consent.”

“You’re mistaken, Count,” the king said firmly. “I told you that I desire the viscount’s happiness—so I’m opposed to his marriage at this time.”

“But, Sire,” cried Athos, “Your Majesty promised me....”

“No, Count, I made no such promise, because it’s not what I want.”

“I understand that Your Majesty intends to be considerate of my desires, but I take the liberty of reminding you that I came here as an

ambassador for another.”

“An ambassador, Count, doesn’t always get what he came to request.”

“Ah, Sire! What a blow to Bragelonne!”

“I’ll take it from here. Let me speak to the viscount.”

“Love, Sire, is an irresistible force.”

“Sometimes, Count, it is resisted, I can assure you.” 85

“When one has the soul of a king—your soul, Sire.”

“Don’t give it another thought. I have plans for Bragelonne; I don’t say that he won’t marry Mademoiselle de La Vallière, but I don’t want him to marry quite so young. I don’t want him to marry a spouse without fortune, and he, for his part, deserves to earn my good graces, and I intend to see he gets them. In short, I want him to wait.”

“Sire, once again....”

“Monsieur le Comte, you have come, you say, to ask me a favor?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Well! Grant me one instead, and let’s speak of this no more. It’s possible that before long I’ll go to war, and I’ll need free gentlemen around me. I hesitate to send in front of the bullets and cannon balls the father of a family. And for Bragelonne’s sake, I would also hesitate to endow an unknown girl without good reason, as it would sow jealousy among the nobility.”

Athos bowed and made no reply.

“Is that everything you needed to ask me?” added Louis XIV.

“Absolutely everything, Sire, and I take my leave of Your Majesty. But must I inform Raoul?”

“Spare yourself that care and vexation. Tell the viscount that I will speak to him tomorrow at my lever. As for tonight, Count, join me at the card table.”

“Alas, I am in traveling clothes, Sire.”

“I hope the day will come when you will not leave me. Before long, Count, the monarchy will be housed in such a way as to offer a dignified hospitality to men of your merit.”

“Sire, if a king is great in the hearts of his subjects, it matters not if he lives in a palace, for he’s worshiped as if in a temple.”

And with these words, Athos withdrew to the antechamber, where he found Bragelonne waiting for him. “Well, Monsieur?” said the young man.

“Raoul, the king favors us, perhaps not in the way you hope, but he means well to our house.”

“You have bad news, Monsieur,” said the young man, turning pale.

“The king will tell you in the morning that it is not bad news.”

“But Monsieur, do you mean the king hasn’t signed the proposal?”

“The king wants to write your marriage contract himself, and he wants to make the terms so good that it will take time to get it right. Mistrust your own impatience before you doubt the king’s goodwill.”

Raoul, who knew the count’s frankness but was wary of his diplomatic eloquence, stood blinking, plunged into dark dismay. “Will you come home with me?” said Athos.

“Forgive me, Monsieur, I’m c-coming,” he stammered. And he followed Athos down the stairs.

“Oh, while I’m here,” Athos said suddenly, “could we stop and see Monsieur d’Artagnan?”

“Shall I lead you to his rooms?” said Bragelonne.

“Yes, absolutely.”

“Then we need to take the other stairs,” Raoul said, changing their direction. But when they arrived on the landing of the grand gallery, he met a footman in the livery of the

Comte de Guiche hurrying toward him. "What is it?" said Raoul.

"This note, Monsieur. The count heard you were back and wrote to you at once; I've been looking for you for an hour."

Raoul turned toward Athos before opening the envelope. "If I may, Monsieur?"

"Go ahead."

Dear Raoul, wrote the Comte de Guiche, I have an important affair that demands urgent attention. I know you're back; come quickly.

He had scarcely finished reading it when a valet in the livery of the Duke of Buckingham appeared on the gallery, and, recognizing him, approached respectfully. "On the behalf of Milord Duke," he said.

"Ah!" said Athos. "I see that you're as busy as a General of the Army. I'll leave you to it and find d'Artagnan on my own."

"Please excuse me," said Raoul.

“Yes, yes, you’re excused. Adieu, Raoul; you’ll find me at my lodgings until mid-morning tomorrow, after which I intend to leave for Blois, unless something interferes.”

“Monsieur, I’ll pay my respects to you in the morning.”

Athos left, and Raoul opened Buckingham’s letter. Monsieur de Bragelonne, it read, of all the Frenchmen I’ve met, I’m best pleased with you, and now I must call upon your friendship. I’ve received a certain note, and though it’s written in good French, I’m an Englishman and fear I may misunderstand it. The only part I’m sure of is that it’s signed by a good name. As I hear you’ve arrived from Blois, would you be so kind as to call upon me? Your devoted etc., Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.

“I’ll find your master,” Raoul said to de Guiche’s footman, dismissing him. “And within the hour I’ll call upon Monsieur de Buckingham,” he added to the duke’s messenger,

dismissing him as well.

XLIV

An
Invitation to
Cross
Swords in
the Surf

Rat de Guiche's rooms, found him
conversing with de Wardes and
Manicamp. De Wardes, since the
aoul, when he arrived

incident at the fence, had treated Raoul as a stranger. It didn't seem as if there'd been a break between them, they just acted as if they didn't know each other.

Raoul entered and de Guiche came to meet him. Raoul, while shaking his friend's hand, glanced at the other two young men, hoping to read on their faces what was moving their minds. De Wardes was cold and impenetrable; Manicamp seemed absorbed in adjusting his suit's lace trim.

De Guiche took Raoul into a dressing room and bade him sit down. "You look well," he said to him.

"That's odd," replied Raoul, "because I certainly don't feel well."

"It's the same as with me, isn't it? Love goes wrong."

"All the better for your sake, Count. For you, I think good news in love would be the worst news of all."

"Don't worry, then, because not

only am I miserable, I'm surrounded by people who are happy."

"Now you've lost me," said Raoul. "Explain, my friend, explain."

"I will, and then you'll understand. I've fought in vain against that feeling you saw born in me; it's grown to take complete hold of me, against all my wisdom and will. I've measured this misfortune, I know it for an abyss, but it's my fate and I'll follow it through."

"Madman! One step over that edge and today it's your ruin, tomorrow maybe your death."

"Then so be it!"

"De Guiche!"

"I tell you, I've thought about this until I can think no more."

"And do you believe that if you tell her everything that Madame will love you?"

"I believe nothing, Raoul, I merely hope, because hope is the heart of

man, and lives in him till he dies.”

“But that happiness you grasp for, if you gained it, you’d be lost.”

“Don’t try to stop me, Raoul, I beg you. I tell you right out you can’t convince me because I refuse to be convinced. I’ve suffered so much I’m past the point of no return, and even death would feel like a blessing. Not only do I love to delirium, I’m jealous to mad fury.”

Raoul thumped his fist into his hand in a gesture that looked, at long last, like anger. “Great,” he said.

“Great or terrible, it hardly matters. Here’s what I ask of you, my friend, my brother. For the last three days Madame has been giddy with happiness. The first day I could scarcely look at her, I hated her so for not being as unhappy as I. The second day I couldn’t look away, and on her side, Raoul, I thought I saw that she looked on me, if not with pity, then at least with some tenderness. But between her gaze and mine there arose a shadow as

another's smile drew a smile from her. Always beside her horse was a horse that wasn't mine, always her ear turned toward a caressing voice that was not my own. Raoul, for three days my head has been on fire, my veins have run with flame. This shadow, I must banish it; that smile, I must smash it; that voice, I must strangle it."

"You want to kill Monsieur?" Raoul cried.

"What? No! I'm not jealous of Monsieur, not jealous of the husband. I'm jealous of the lover."

"Of the lover?"

"You mean you haven't noticed him here when he was so apparent to you before?"

"You're jealous of Monsieur de Buckingham?"

"Unto death!"

"Again? Or is it still?"

"Oh, this time we'll settle it

properly! I took the initiative and sent him a challenge.”

“Wait, you’re the one who wrote to him?”

“How do you know about it?”

“I know because he told me. Here.”
And he handed de Guiche the note he’d received at the same time as his friend’s.

De Guiche read it eagerly. “He’s a brave man, and more than that, a gallant man,” he said.

“Of course, the duke is a gallant man, and I don’t need to ask if your challenge was equally gallant.”

“He’ll show you my letter when you call on him on my behalf.”

“But that’s impossible.”

“What is?”

“For me to call on him for you.”

“Why?”

“Because both you and the duke

summon me.”

“Oh, I assume you’ll give me the preference! Now listen, here’s what I want you to tell His Grace, it’s very simple: just pick a day, today, tomorrow, the day after, whatever suits him, and meet me at Vincennes.”

“Think about this.”

“I thought I told you I was done thinking.”

“The duke is a foreign envoy here on a mission, he’s untouchable ... and Vincennes is dangerously close to the Bastille.”

“The consequences are my business.”

“But the pretext for this meeting? What reason do you want me to give him?”

“He won’t ask for any reason, trust me. The duke must be as sick of me as I am of him, must hate as much as I hate. I beg you to do this for me, and if I have to beg him to accept my

challenge, then I'll beg."

"This is pointless. Look, the duke said he wanted to speak to me. He's in the king's gaming party; come along with me. I'll talk to him in the gallery while you hang back. Two words are all it will take."

"Good, fine. I'm going to bring de Wardes along as support."

"Why not Manicamp? We can always call de Wardes if we need him, leave him here."

"True, but I'd rather not."

"He knows nothing of this?"

"Absolutely nothing! ...You're so cold to him these days."

"Has he told you why?"

"No."

"I don't like that man and I never have, so I'm no colder to him today than I was yesterday."

"Let's go, then."

All four went down to the courtyard. De Guiche's carriage was waiting at the door to take them to the Palais Royal.

On the way, Raoul was thinking furiously. Privy to both parties' secrets, he still hoped to find a way to reconcile them. He knew his influence with Buckingham and his sway over de Guiche, so he wasn't ready to despair.

Arriving in the gallery, resplendent with wax lights, where the most beautiful and illustrious ladies of the court were orbiting like stars through a sky of flame, Raoul couldn't help but forget de Guiche for a moment when he saw Louise, who stood, amid the other maids of honor, staring at the royal circle, which was dazzling with diamonds and gold. The king was the only man who was seated, the other cavaliers were standing. Among them Raoul saw Buckingham. He was ten paces from Monsieur among a group of French and Englishmen admiring the duke's hauteur and the incomparable

magnificence of his clothing. Some of the older courtiers remembered having seen his father, and their recollections did no harm to the son.

Buckingham was conversing with Fouquet, who was speaking loudly of Belle-Île. "I couldn't possibly interrupt them," said Raoul.

"Wait and choose your moment, but don't wait too long," said de Guiche. "I burn!"

"Ah, here comes our savior," said Raoul, seeing d'Artagnan, who, resplendent in his new uniform as Captain of the Musketeers, had just made a triumphal entry into the gallery.

He went straight to d'Artagnan. "The Comte de La Fère was looking for you," Raoul said.

"Yes, I just left him," d'Artagnan replied.

"I expected you to spend most of the evening together."

"We've arranged to meet again."

While answering Raoul, d'Artagnan, preoccupied, was looking right and left, scanning the crowd in the gallery for someone or something. Suddenly his eye fixed like that of an eagle spotting its prey. Raoul followed his look, and though he saw de Guiche and d'Artagnan nod to each other, he couldn't discern the target of the proud captain's piercing gaze.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said Raoul, "there's a service that only you can render me."

"What would that be, my dear Viscount?"

"I need to say a couple of words to Monsieur de Buckingham, but as he's speaking with Monsieur Fouquet, I'm not the person to interrupt them."

"Ah, Monsieur Fouquet is here?" asked d'Artagnan.

"Yes, do you see him? There."

"Faith, so I do! And you think I carry more weight than you?"

"You're a man of importance!"

“Why, so I am—I’m captain of the musketeers. I was promised the rank for so long, and have had it so briefly, that I quite forgot my dignity.”

“You’ll do this for me, won’t you?”

“Monsieur Fouquet, diable!”

“Do you have an issue with him?”

“No, he’s more likely to have an issue with me. But still, it has to be done one day or another....”

“There, I think he’s looking at you. Or could it be...?”

“No, you’re not wrong, it really is me he does the honor to look at.”

“Then this is a good moment.”

“You think so?”

“Go, then, I beg you.”

“I’m going.”

De Guiche had kept an eye on Raoul, and Raoul signaled him that everything was arranged.

D'Artagnan walked straight up to the glittering group and bowed politely to Monsieur Fouquet. "Bonjour, Monsieur d'Artagnan. We were just talking about Belle-Île-en-Mer," said Fouquet, with a meaningful glance and the social grace that it takes half a life to learn, and that some people, no matter how they study, never achieve.

"About Belle-Île?" said d'Artagnan. "I believe that's your domain, isn't it, Monsieur Fouquet?"

"Your servant, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Buckingham with a bow. "Monsieur Fouquet just informed me that he's given Belle-Île to the king,"

"Do you know Belle-Île, Chevalier?" Fouquet asked the musketeer.

"I've been there only once, Monsieur," replied d'Artagnan, like a man born to wit and gallantry.

"Did you stay long?"

“Less than a day, Monseigneur.”

“But you got a good look at it?”

“As much as can be seen in a day.”

“One might see a lot in a day with eyes like yours, Monsieur.”

D’Artagnan bowed.

Meanwhile, Raoul was signaling to Buckingham. “Monsieur le Surintendant,” said Buckingham, “I’ll leave you with the captain, who knows so much more than I about bastions, scarps, and counterscarps. I leave only to join a friend who beckons to me. You understand....”

And Buckingham detached himself from the group and moved toward Raoul, only pausing for a moment by the table where Madame, the queen mother, the young queen, and the king were playing cards.

“Quickly, Raoul,” said de Guiche, “there he is: be fast and firm!”

Buckingham indeed, after paying his compliments to Madame,

continued toward Raoul.

Raoul advanced to meet him; de Guiche hung back but followed him with his eyes. The maneuver was performed so that the young men met in the gap between the group around the card table and a band of gentlemen talking by the gallery windows. But just as the two were about to meet, they were joined by a third.

It was Monsieur who was advancing on the Duke of Buckingham. Monsieur wore on his pink and perfumed lips his most charming smile. "Mon Dieu," he said, aggressively polite, "what's this story I've heard, my dear Duke?"

Buckingham hadn't seen Monsieur coming but turned suddenly at his voice. He shuddered despite himself, and a slight pallor appeared on his cheeks. "Why, Monseigneur," he said, "what could Your Highness have heard to cause such great astonishment?"

"A thing that fills me with despair,

Duke,” said the prince, “and that will drive the whole Court into mourning.”

“Ah, Your Highness is too good,” said Buckingham, “for I see he wishes to speak of my departure.”

“Quite so.”

“Alas, Monseigneur, to spend only a week in Paris is more a matter of mourning for me.”

De Guiche heard all this from his nearby position and shuddered in his turn. “His departure!” he murmured. “Can it be?”

Philippe was continuing with the same gracious air, “If the King of England summons you, Monsieur, that I can understand; we all know that His Majesty Charles II, who loves his gentlemen, can’t do without you. But it shouldn’t be said that we lost you without regrets, so please accept mine.”

“Monseigneur,” said the duke, “believe that if I leave the Court of France....”

“It’s because they call you back, I understand that. But if you think my word has any weight with your king, I offer to beg His Majesty Charles II to leave you with us a while longer.”

“Such kindness overwhelms me, Monseigneur,” replied Buckingham, “but I have specific orders. My sojourn in France was limited, and I’ve prolonged it at the risk of displeasing my gracious sovereign. Only today did I remember that I should have left four days ago.”

“Oh!” Monsieur said.

“Yes, however,” added Buckingham, raising his voice loud enough to be heard by the princesses, “I’m like that man from the far east who was *lost for several days in a beautiful dream*, 86 then woke one fine morning to find himself cured and restored to sanity. The Court of France has intoxications as strong as that dream, but one day we awaken and must leave. I couldn’t prolong my stay even if Your Highness asked it of me.”

“And when do you depart?”
Philippe asked, all solicitude.

“Tomorrow, Monseigneur. My
carriages have been ready for three
days.”

The Duc d’Orléans gave a nod and
a shrug that signified, If that’s how it
is, Duke, there’s nothing more to say.

Buckingham raised his eyes to the
queens and his gaze met that of Anne
of Austria, who nodded her thanks
and approval. Buckingham returned
the gesture, concealing behind a
smile the tightening around his heart.

Monsieur returned the way he’d
come—but from the other direction
the Comte de Guiche approached.
Raoul feared the impatient young
man would deliver his challenge
himself and hastened to intercept
him.

“No, no, Raoul, it’s all pointless
now,” said de Guiche, extending his
hands to the duke and drawing him
behind a pillar. “Oh, Duke, Duke!”
said de Guiche. “Forgive me for what

I wrote to you, I was out of my mind.
Give me back my letter!"

"Too true," said the young duke with a melancholy smile. "You can't hold a grudge against me now."

"Oh, Duke, forgive me and take my friendship, my eternal friendship...."

"Why, indeed, should you object to me, Count, from the moment after which I'll never see her again?"

Hearing these friendly words, Raoul realized his services were of no further use to these two young men and withdrew a few steps. This movement brought him closer to de Wardes, who was speaking of Buckingham's departure to the Chevalier de Lorraine. "A wise retreat!" said de Wardes.

"Why is that?"

"Because the dear duke saves himself from a sword-thrust by it." And both of them laughed.

Raoul, indignant, turned toward them with a glare, lips curled

disdainfully, and flushed to the temples. The Chevalier de Lorraine spun on his heel and faced away, but de Wardes stood firm and waited.

“Monsieur,” said Raoul to de Wardes, “you continue your practice of insulting the absent? Yesterday it was Monsieur d’Artagnan, and today it is Monsieur de Buckingham.”

“But you know, Monsieur,” said de Wardes, “that sometimes I insult those who are present.”

De Wardes prodded Raoul with a finger, their shoulders leaned toward each other, their faces bent together as if each would inflame the other with the fire of his anger. The first felt that he was at the crest of his hatred, the second at the end of his patience.

Suddenly they heard a voice full of grace and civility say calmly, “I believe I heard my name mentioned.”

They turned: it was d’Artagnan, who, with a smiling eye and a cheerful expression, placed a hand

on de Wardes's shoulder. Raoul stepped aside to make room for the musketeer. De Wardes shuddered all over and turned pale but didn't retreat.

D'Artagnan, still smiling, stepped into the space Raoul had made for him. "Thank you, my dear Raoul," he said. "De Wardes, I need to talk to you. Don't go away, Raoul; everyone can hear what I have to say to Monsieur de Wardes." Then his smile faded, and his eyes went as cold and as sharp as a steel blade.

"I'm at your service, Monsieur," said de Wardes.

"Monsieur, I've been looking for an opportunity to speak with you for quite a while, but haven't found it until today," said d'Artagnan. "This isn't the best place for it, I admit, but if you will take the trouble to come to my rooms, they are just downstairs from this gallery."

"I'm all yours, Monsieur," said de Wardes.

“Are you by yourself, Monsieur?”
said d’Artagnan.

“No, I with Messieurs de
Manicamp and de Guiche, two of my
friends.”

“Fine,” said d’Artagnan, “but two
isn’t enough; can you find a few
more?”

“Certainly!” said the young man,
who wasn’t sure what d’Artagnan had
in mind. “As many as you like.”

“Friends?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Good friends?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then arrange it, if you please. You
too, Raoul—bring along Monsieur de
Guiche and Monsieur de Buckingham,
if you would.”

“Mon Dieu, Monsieur, what a
production!” said de Wardes, trying
to smile.

The captain raised a hand to enjoin

patience and said, "No rush. I'll be waiting, Monsieur."

"Give me a minute."

"In a minute, then." And he went down to his chambers.

His rooms weren't empty; the Comte de La Fère was waiting there, sitting in the embrasure of a window. "Well?" he asked d'Artagnan as he came in.

"Well!" said the latter. "Monsieur de Wardes does me the honor to pay me a visit, in the company of some of his friends and ours."

In fact, de Wardes and Manicamp came in behind him, followed by de Guiche and Buckingham, surprised and unsure what was afoot. Raoul followed with three other gentlemen; he surveyed the room, spotted the count, and went to stand near him.

D'Artagnan received his visitors with all courtesy, keeping his countenance calm and polite. All his guests were men of distinction well

known at Court. He apologized to everyone for any inconvenience he'd caused, then turned to de Wardes, who, despite himself, couldn't keep from showing some surprise and anxiety.

"Monsieur," d'Artagnan said, "now that we're out of the king's presence, where we can speak frankly without impropriety, I'll tell you why I took the liberty of inviting you to my quarters, and to gather these gentlemen as well. I've learned, from my friend the Comte de La Fère, of the insulting accusations you've made about me, and that you consider me your mortal enemy because I had fought with your father."

"It's true, Monsieur, I did say that," hissed de Wardes, his pallor tinged with a slight flame.

"You accuse me of some crime, or fault, or act of cowardice. Please state your accusation."

"In front of witnesses, Monsieur?"

“Yes, absolutely, in front of witnesses—and you see the witnesses I’ve chosen are experts in matters of honor.”

“I don’t think you properly appreciate my delicacy, Monsieur. I accused you, it’s true, but I have kept confidential the details of my accusation. Rather than act indiscreetly, I chose to express my hatred before people who would be sure to let you know of it. You overlook my discretion, though you said nothing to my silence. This doesn’t seem to me like your usual careful prudence, Monsieur d’Artagnan.”

D’Artagnan gnawed on the end of his mustache. “Monsieur,” he said, “I’ve already had the honor to beg you to articulate your grievances against me.”

“Aloud?”

“Parbleu!”

“I will speak, then.”

“So, speak, Monsieur,” said d’Artagnan, bowing. “We’re all listening to you.”

“Well, Monsieur, it was not an injury to me, but an injury to my father.”

“You already said that.”

“Yes, but there are certain matters that can be handled only with circumspection.”

“Do you imply that it was a shameful act?”

“In every way.”

The witnesses began to glance at each other anxiously, but they were reassured when they saw that d’Artagnan’s face showed no emotion.

De Wardes was silent.

“Speak, Monsieur,” said the musketeer. “You see that you’re keeping us waiting.”

“Well, then, listen! My father loved a woman, a noble woman, and this

woman loved my father.”

D’Artagnan exchanged a glance with Athos.

De Wardes continued. “D’Artagnan intercepted a letter appointing a tryst, and substituted himself, in darkness and disguise, for the invited lover.”

“That’s true,” said d’Artagnan.

A slight murmur was heard from the listeners.

“Yes, I did that disgraceful thing. You should have added, Monsieur, you who are so impartial, that at the time of the event you reproach me for I was not yet twenty-one years old.”

“The act was no less shameful for that,” said de Wardes, “and the age of reason is old enough for a gentleman not to commit an indelicacy.”

A louder murmur was heard, of astonishment and almost doubt.

“It was a shameful trick, indeed,” said d’Artagnan, “and I didn’t wait for

Monsieur de Wardes's reproaches to reproach myself for it, and very bitterly, too. Age has made me more reasonable, and above all more honest, and I've expiated this shame by long and deep regrets. But I appeal to you, gentlemen: it happened in 1626, at a time that, luckily for you, you know only from history, a time when romance lacked scruples, and a man's conscience didn't choke him with poison and bitterness. We were young soldiers at war, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, with our swords rarely long in their sheaths; the hand of war made us hard, and the hand of the cardinal made us hasty. But I repented all that long ago, Monsieur de Wardes, and there are other things I'm still repenting."

"Yes, Monsieur, that's understandable, for the action required repentance—but you nonetheless brought a lady to ruin. She of whom you speak, overcome by shame, crushed by the insult, was driven from France, and we never knew what became of her...."

“But others did,” said the Comte de La Fère, raising his arm toward de Wardes with a grim smile. “Yes, Monsieur, others did, and there are still some who, having heard of her, will recognize her from the portrait I shall draw. She was a woman of twenty-five, slender, fair, and blond, who had married in England.”

“Married?” said de Wardes.

“Ah, you didn’t know she was married? You see, Monsieur de Wardes, that we are better informed than you. Did you know she was usually referred to as Milady, with no other name than that?”

“Yes, Monsieur, I knew that.”

“My God,” murmured Buckingham.

“Well! This Milady, having come from England, returned there, after having three times conspired at the murder of Monsieur d’Artagnan. Simple justice, you might say; after all, Monsieur d’Artagnan had insulted her. But it was not for justice that while in England, by her seductions,

she enslaved a young man in the service of Lord de Winter, a man named Felton. Do you grow pale, Milord Buckingham? Your eyes kindle with anger and pain. Then finish the story, Milord, and tell Monsieur de Wardes about the woman who put the knife in the hand of your father's assassin."

A gasp came from every mouth. The young duke said nothing, only mopped his suddenly sodden forehead with a handkerchief. Silence fell upon all the listeners.

"You see, Monsieur de Wardes," said d'Artagnan, unexpectedly moved as his memories were revived by Athos's words, "my crime caused no lady to lose her soul, for this woman's soul was lost long before my deceitful act. But it was still a matter that gnawed at my conscience. However, now that the fact has been established, it remains for me to ask you, Monsieur de Wardes, very humbly to pardon this shameful act, as I would have asked your father's forgiveness, if he still lived, upon my

return to France after the death of Charles I.”

“That’s going too far, Monsieur d’Artagnan,” several voices burst out.

“I think not, Messieurs,” said the captain. “Now, Monsieur de Wardes, I hope the matter is settled between us, and you will no longer speak ill of me. That heals the wound, does it not?”

De Wardes looked down and muttered something unintelligible.

“I hope, too,” said d’Artagnan, stepping closer to the young man, “that you will give up the unfortunate habit of speaking ill of others, for a man as upright and conscientious as you, who would reproach an old soldier with the sins of his youth thirty-five years before—you, I repeat, so upright and conscientious, must accept the duty to do nothing yourself that would violate honor and conscience. Listen to what I say to you, Monsieur de Wardes. Take care that no shameful story that involves your name should reach my ears.”

“Monsieur, there’s no point in threatening me over nothing,” said de Wardes.

“Nothing? But I haven’t finished, Monsieur de Wardes,” said d’Artagnan, “and I’m afraid that I have more yet to say.”

The circle of listeners, curious, closed in.

“You spoke just now of the honor of a lady and the honor of your father, and that pleased us, for it’s sweet to think that this feeling of delicacy and honor so rare in my generation’s soul lives now in the soul of our children, and it’s encouraging to see a young man at the age where one is usually the thief of a woman’s honor instead respecting and defending them.”

De Wardes pursed his lips and clenched his fists, clearly anxious about where a speech that started so ominously would end.

“How is it, then,” continued d’Artagnan, “that you allowed yourself to say to Monsieur de

Bragelonne that he did not know his mother?"

Raoul's eyes flashed. "Oh, Monsieur le Chevalier," he cried, rushing forward, "Monsieur le Chevalier, that's a matter personal to me."

De Wardes smiled wickedly.

D'Artagnan's arm restrained Raoul. "Young man, don't interrupt me," he said. And looking down at de Wardes, he continued, "I'm dealing here with the kind of question that isn't solved by the sword. I bring it up before men of honor who have all had their swords in their hands more than once. I chose them deliberately, for these gentlemen all know that a secret one fights for cannot remain a secret. I repeat my question to you, Monsieur de Wardes: why did you offend this young man by insulting both his father and his mother?"

"It seems to me," said de Wardes, "that one may speak freely when one supports his words with the means at the disposal of a man of honor."

“Indeed, Monsieur? What are the means by which a man of honor can support dishonorable words?”

“By the sword.”

“You’re wrong, not only by logic, but also by faith and by honor, and being wrong you would risk the lives of several men in addition to your own, which seems reckless to me. All fashions pass away, Monsieur, and the fashion for such armed encounters has passed, not to mention that there are His Majesty’s edicts that forbid dueling. So, to be consistent with your own ideas of chivalry, you will apologize to Monsieur Raoul de Bragelonne; you will tell him that you regret having made such a petty remark, and that the nobility and purity of his heritage are written, not just on his face, but in all the actions of his life. You will make this apology, Monsieur de Wardes, as I made mine just now, me, an old captain, to your downy lad’s mustache.”

“And what if I don’t?” de Wardes

demanded.

“Well! If it comes to that....”

“It will come to what you hoped to prevent!” said de Wardes with a laugh. “All of your logic of conciliation will just lead to a violation of the king’s edicts.”

“No, Monsieur, you’re quite wrong,” the captain said quietly.

“What will happen, then?”

“What will happen is that I will go to the king, with whom I’m in pretty good standing; the king, to whom I’ve had the happiness to render some service since before the time you were born; the king, in short, who, at my request, has just given me a *carte blanche* for Monsieur *Baisemeaux de Montlezun*, ⁸⁷ Governor of the Bastille. I will say to the king, ‘Sire, a man has delivered a cowardly insult about the person of his mother to Monsieur de Bragelonne. I have filled that man’s name in the *lettre de cachet* ⁸⁸ that Your Majesty kindly gave me, and by it Monsieur de

Wardes shall be confined in the Bastille for three years.”

And d’Artagnan, drawing from his pocket an order signed by the king, handed it to de Wardes.

Then, seeing that the young man was not entirely convinced and thought he was bluffing, he shrugged his shoulders and strode calmly to the table, where there was ink and a plume large enough even for Porthos.

Then de Wardes saw that the threat was serious—and the Bastille, even in that time, was already a source of terror. He took a step toward Raoul and said, in an almost unintelligible voice, “Monsieur, I apologize to you in the terms which Monsieur d’Artagnan has dictated, and which I am forced to say to you.”

“Now, now, Monsieur,” said the musketeer with the utmost tranquility. “I did not dictate, ‘which I am forced to say to you.’ I said that the apology was one that your conscience compelled you to make. That phrase is superior, believe me,

and will be a more convincing expression of your feelings.”

“I agree to that phrasing, then,” said de Wardes, “though in truth, Messieurs, you must admit that a sword thrust through the body, the former method, is better than this bullying.”

“No, Monsieur,” replied Buckingham, “for taking a sword thrust doesn’t show whether you were right or wrong, it means only that you were less skilled.”

“Monsieur...!” cried de Wardes.

“Ah ah!” interrupted d’Artagnan, cutting de Wardes off. “You’re about to say something unwise, and I’m doing you the favor of stopping you.”

“Is that all, Monsieur?” demanded de Wardes.

“Absolutely all,” replied d’Artagnan, “and these gentlemen and I are satisfied with you.”

“Believe me, Monsieur,” said de Wardes, “your verbal expediences

don't satisfy everyone!"

"And why is that?"

"Because I would wager that Monsieur de Bragelonne and I will part even greater enemies than before."

"You are mistaken about me, Monsieur," replied Raoul. "I don't have even an atom of enmity in my heart toward you."

D'Artagnan bowed graciously to the gentlemen who had been kind enough to attend this exhibition, and each one shook his hand as they departed.

No one shook de Wardes's hand.

"Oh!" cried the young man, succumbing to the rage devouring his heart. "Is there no one upon whom I can avenge myself?"

"Indeed there is, Monsieur, because there's still me," whispered a voice in his ear dripping with menace.

De Wardes turned to see the Duke

of Buckingham, who, apparently remaining behind for just this purpose, had drawn near. "You, Monsieur!" cried de Wardes.

"Yes, me. I'm no subject of the King of France, and I'm not staying in his realm, since I'm leaving for England. And I, too, am consumed with rage and despair. Like you, I need to avenge myself on someone. I approve of the principles stated by Monsieur d'Artagnan, but I'm not obliged to apply them to you. I'm English, and I'm here to propose to you what you have vainly proposed to others."

"Monsieur le Duc!"

"Come, Monsieur de Wardes, since you're so angry, use me for your target dummy. I'll be in Calais in thirty-four hours. Ride with me, the road will seem shorter with company. We'll draw our swords on the strand that's covered by the tide, land which for six hours at a time is the territory of France and for the following six hours belongs only to God."

“Very well,” replied de Wardes, “I accept.”

“By God!” said the duke. “If you kill me, Monsieur de Wardes, I swear you’ll be doing me a favor.”

“I’ll do what I can to make myself agreeable, Duke,” said de Wardes.

“Then it’s agreed, you’re coming with me.”

“I’m at your service. Pardieu! I need to soothe my heart with some mortal danger.”

“Well, I think we’ve found it for you! Your servant, Monsieur de Wardes; tomorrow morning, my footman will call upon you to name the time of our departure. We’ll travel together as friends, but understand that I like to travel fast. Adieu!” Buckingham bowed to de Wardes and returned to the king’s gaming party.

De Wardes, exasperated, left the Palais Royal and rode fiercely to his Paris address.

THE END

***The
story
continues
in Book
Seven,
Devil's
Dance***

Notes on the Text of *Court of Daggers*

- **1 PALAIS ROYAL:** Cardinal Richelieu started building his Palais Cardinal 1633 and completed it in 1639. When Richelieu died in 1642, he willed his grand Paris residence to the king, and it was renamed the Palais Royal. Upon the death of Louis XIII, Queen Anne moved her family—including Cardinal Mazarin—from the Louvre into the more modern Palais Royal.
- **2 GRIMAUD:** The laconic Grimaud has been Athos's "lackey," or manservant, since *The Three Musketeers*. Like the musketeers' other lackeys, Grimaud appears throughout the *Musketeers Cycle*, and eventually one gets the impression that this stoic but caring and utterly reliable man was Dumas's favorite of the four.

- **3 MONCK:** General George Monck or Monk, 1st Duke of Albemarle (1608-1670) was a career soldier who worked his way up through the ranks, fighting on the Continent, the Scottish border, and against the Irish in the rebellion of 1641. He became one of Oliver Cromwell's most trusted commanders and proved to be as canny at political strategy as he was at warfare. After Cromwell's death, he consolidated his position in the north of Britain and began a waiting game, biding his time to see how matters would play out. He finally threw his support behind Charles II and was instrumental in the Restoration that put the Stuarts back on the throne. He was rewarded with a peerage and, eventually, the admiralty.
- **4 PISTOLES:** Pistole was a French word for a gold coin of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, usually Spanish in origin. The leading European states liked to mint their own coins, but gold was hard for them to come by—except for

Spain, which flooded Europe with gold from its possessions in the New World, making the Spanish escudo the de facto base currency of European trade for two centuries. When Dumas's characters refer to pistoles, they are mostly Spanish escudos. One pistole is worth about ten livres or three French crowns (écus).

- **5 YOU WENT TO SPAIN FOR THE ROYAL WEDDING:** Well, to the border, anyway: the June 7, 1660 wedding of Louis XIV and the Infanta Maria Theresa was held on the Isle of Pheasants in the Bidassoa river that forms part of the border between Spain and France.
- **6 THE LOUVRE:** The ancient palace of the Kings of France in Paris; first built as a medieval fortress in the 12th century, it was enlarged and modernized by each succeeding generation if the reigning monarch could afford it. The royal residences were mainly in the four three-story halls that surround the square Cour Carrée, the easternmost portion of the

modern Louvre.

- **7 THE KING'S MUSKETEERS:** A company—later two—of elite soldiers, the musketeers were the personal guard of King Louis XIII and after him Louis XIV. They were founded in 1622 when a carbine-armed company of light horsemen was upgraded and given the new, heavier matchlock muskets as primary arms. Though their function was mainly ceremonial and to serve as royal bodyguards, they were sometimes deployed on the battlefield, where they fought either mounted as cavalry or dismounted and relying on their muskets. They are often depicted wearing their signature blue tabards with white crosses, which were adopted sometime in the 1630s.
- **8 PLANCHET:** Like his counterparts who serve the three musketeers, d'Artagnan's stalwart Picard lackey appears throughout the novels of the Musketeers Cycle, eventually becoming less servant

to the Gascon than friend and partner.

- **9 VINCENNES:** The Château de Vincennes, a grim 14th-century royal fortress just east of Paris, was used by the French monarchy as a refuge in wartime and as a prison for their enemies in times of peace.
- **10 FRANÇOIS II:** François II (1544-1560) came to the French throne at the age of fifteen when his father, Henri II, was killed at a tournament in a jousting accident. Immature and unready to rule, François was a pawn in the hands of his mother, Queen Catherine de Médicis, and died of an ear infection less than a year and a half after his coronation. His widow was the young Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, whose dramatic life Dumas recounted in both fiction and nonfiction.
- **11 THE PLACE DE GRÈVE:** In Paris, the broad square on the Right Bank of the Seine in front of the Hôtel de Ville where convicted criminals were publicly tortured and executed, commoners by

hanging and nobles by decapitation.

- **12 LIVRES:** The livre was the standard unit of account in French finances; in this period, it was used mostly for reckoning official finances rather than as a coin. In value it was about equal to a franc, or one-third of a crown. The smallest French coin was the denier, then the sou, the franc, and the crown (écu). Approximate values were 12 deniers to 1 sou, 20 sous to 1 franc, 3 francs to 1 crown, and 3 crowns to 1 pistole (see Note 4).
- **13 FONTAINEBLEAU:** Originally a royal hunting lodge in the middle of the forest southeast of Paris, the Château de Fontainebleau was expanded by many French monarchs over the centuries until by the time of Louis XIV the palace, gardens, and grounds were extensive and extravagant. It was grand and imposing, which Louis loved, and he spent more time there than any other king.
- **14 SWISS GUARD:** From the Renaissance

onward, Swiss mercenaries served as royal guards in a number of European courts, most notably France and Spain.

- **15 LOUIS THE JUST:** Louis XIII was called “Louis the Just” because he was born under the sign of Libra, but he loved the appellation because it implied a Solomonic ruling wisdom that he most emphatically lacked.
- **16 THE BASTILLE:** This hulking fortress, built at the eastern entrance to Paris during the 14th century to protect the city during the Hundred Years War, served a second function as a royal prison starting early in the 15th century. Its eight cylindrical towers, connected by tall curtain walls, housed prisoners of all ranks in lodgings befitting their differing social conditions. Many prisoners who entered the Bastille were never seen again.
- **17 THE KING’S LITTLE STAIR:** The Petit Escalier, or the King’s Little Stair, was His

Majesty's private entrance into the palace from an inside corner of the Louvre's Cour Carrée.

- **18 MADEMOISELLE DE MANCINI:** Marie de Mancini (1639-1715) was the middle-born of the five nieces of Cardinal Mazarin that he brought over from Italy to find them politically advantageous marriages in France. Though not the most conventionally pretty of the sisters, Marie was by all accounts the liveliest and most intelligent, and when they were teenagers, she became the first real love (of many) of Louis XIV. He explored the idea of making her his wife but was forcefully dissuaded by the queen and cardinal.
- **19 MONSIEUR DE LYONNE:** Hugues de Lionne or Lyonne (1611-1671) was a French statesman who served Louis XIV as Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- **20 CAPTAIN-LIEUTENANT OF MUSKETEERS:** Though called Captain of

Musketeers for short, the position the king refers to was technically Captain-Lieutenant of the King's Musketeers because the ultimate rank of "Captain" notionally was held by the king himself. Louis is right about the prestige and precedent the position commanded at Court due to its propinquity to the Crown, though it was less prestigious as a battlefield rank in times of open warfare.

- **21 BELLE-ÎLE-EN-MER:** A medium-sized island in the Atlantic, Belle-Île is about ten miles off the south coast of Brittany, renowned for its mild summer climate and the dramatic cliffs along its Côte sauvage.
- **22 SAINT-MANDÉ:** In 1654 Fouquet bought the mansion of Saint-Mandé just east of Paris on the road to Vincennes, which he had refurbished and expanded in a grand manner that prefigured his construction of the extravagant estate of Vaux-le-Vicomte.
- **23 ARIADNE:** In the Greek myth of

Theseus and the Minotaur, Ariadne was the prisoner in the labyrinth who led Theseus to her by means of a thread.

- **24 HÔTEL DE VILLE:** The Hôtel de Ville is the French municipal building Americans would call City Hall.
- **25 MONSIEUR DE MENNEVILLE:** In the previous volume, *Between Two Kings*, the roguish swashbuckler Menneville had served d'Artagnan as second in command on his expedition to England to abduct General Monck.
- **26 THE POMME-DE-PIN OR THE BARREAUX VERTS:** Two notorious Parisian taverns: the Pomme-de-Pin was the legendary watering-hole of the demimonde tucked away back in the ancient alleys of the Île de la Cité, the former hangout of the outlaw poet François Villon and the satirical humanist François Rabelais, while the Barreaux Verts was a low dive in the Marais near the Bastille.

- **27 AMPHITRYON:** In Greek myth, Amphitryon was a king whose wife was seduced by Zeus in disguise, later giving birth to Hercules. His story has been retold many times, perhaps most notably by Molière in 1668, in a play where he's represented as the host of a great banquet. Dumas has jumped the gun by eight years in having La Fontaine refer to Fouquet in the same terms.
- **28 THE CONCIERGERIE:** The grimmest piece of the medieval Paris City Palace (Palais de la Cité) on the Île de la Cité, the Conciergerie was used as a state prison from the 13th century until after the Revolution. The governor was a royal appointee.
- **29 EPICURUS:** The empiricist Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) taught that the purpose of life and philosophy was to define and find happiness and tranquility.

- **30 'ANTECHO,' AS THEY SAY AT PORT ROYAL:** The abbey of Port Royal in Paris was the center of Jansenism, one of the leading Catholic theological movements in 17th-century France. The Jansenists were ascetics who insisted that only divine grace could counter original sin and the darker side of human nature. Many in the Catholic hierarchy, particularly the Jesuits, considered Jansenism heresy, albeit of a mild sort. Antecho is Greek and, as used in debates, means, "I stand my ground."
- **31 ALCIDES:** An alternative name for Heracles or Hercules.
- **32 EPICTETUS:** The Greek philosopher Epictetus (55-135) was one of the Stoics and taught that one should accept what happens, though a person is responsible for their own actions.
- **33 THE QUAI LE PELLETIER:** In 1660, the Right Bank of the Seine along the Place de Grève and extending upstream and east

past the Hôtel de Ville, a muddy shore occupied by noisome tanners and dyers, was still known as the Place au Foin; it wouldn't be called Le Pelletier until 1675 when Colbert, in one of his urban improvements, had it cleaned up, paved, and named after the then-current Merchants' Provost. In 1868 it was merged with the Quai des Gesvres to the west and is known by that name today.

- **34 THE FAUBOURG AND RUE SAINT-ANTOINE:** The Rue Saint-Antoine was the broad street that extended east from the Place de Grève to the gate in the walls of Paris overlooked by the Bastille; the Faubourg (quarter or neighborhood) was the surrounding district.
- **35 THE GOD PLUTO:** The Roman god of wealth, who lends his name to words such as plutocrat.
- **36 BAUTRU:** Guillaume Bautru, Comte de Serrant (1588–1685) was a courtier, wit, poet, and diplomat, acting as one of

Richelieu's trusted envoys—he appears in that role in *The Red Sphinx*. Bautru was one of the founding members in 1634 of the Académie Française.

- **37 LIKE A HARLEQUIN ON A STAGE:** Harlequin, a melodramatic clown, was one of the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte* traveling theater troupes so popular in Europe in the 17th century. Harlequin was often performed without speaking, conveying all action with exaggerated movement and dramatic gestures.
- **38 CALCHAS OR PYTHIA OF APOLLO:** Greek soothsayers who received their prophecies from the god Apollo: Calchas advised King Agamemnon in the Trojan War, and Pythia was the high priestess known as the Oracle of Delphi.
- **39 MONSIEUR DE TURENNE ... WINNING THE BATTLE OF THE DUNES:** After the rebellion of the Fronde, when the Prince de Condé left France to become a

commander for the Spanish, his cousin the Marshal de Turenne became the leading French general. He beat Condé several times, including at the Battle of the Dunes, fought outside Dunkirk in 1658.

- **40 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING:** Monck taking d'Artagnan to a performance of *Much Ado About Nothing* is certainly an invention of Dumas's, but though unlikely it's not impossible: several of Shakespeare's plays were revived after the Restoration, and *Much Ado* found considerable popularity during the reign of Charles II.
- **41 THE MAXIMS OF MONSIEUR DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD:** Though François IV de La Rochefoucauld, Prince de Marcillac or Marsillac, Duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680) published the first version of his celebrated *Maxims* in 1665, they had been circulating in manuscript form among the French literati since 1657, so d'Artagnan's second-hand familiarity with

some of them in 1660 is not entirely impossible. The musketeer most likely to be familiar with them, however, is Aramis, who in *Twenty Years After* was a romantic rival of the Prince de Marcillac for the affections of Madame de Longueville.

- **42 ALBERT DE LUYNES:** Charles d'Albert, Duc de Luynes (1578–1621) was the young Louis XIII's falconer and first favorite. Luynes engineered the assassination of Concini that ended Queen Marie's regency and put Louis XIII on the throne, and the king rewarded Luynes by making him first a duke and then Constable of France.
- **43 DE VITRY:** Baron Nicolas de Vitry, Captain of the King's Guard, killed the overweening Concino Concini in 1617 at the behest of Louis XIII and his favorite, Luynes (see Note 42).
- **44 THE FAMOUS YELLOW HORSE ON WHICH HE'D FIRST MADE HIS ENTRANCE**

INTO THE WIDE WORLD: In Chapter I of The Three Musketeers.

- **45 THE FAMILY DE RAIS:** Belle-Île had been a fief of the infamous Gilles de Rais (1405-1440), luridly infamous as a serial killer of children for occult sacrificial purposes.
- **46 THE GENTLEMAN COMEDIANS OF THE HÔTEL DE BOURGOGNE:** This venue was the first dedicated dramatic theatre built in Paris, opening in 1548, and well into the mid-17th century it was the premier venue for French drama; every aspiring Parisian playwright hoped to see his work performed there. From 1628 to 1680 its house troupe was the Comédiens du Roi.
- **47 MESSIEURS CORNEILLE, ROTROU, AND GARNIER:** Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), Jean Rotrou (1609-1650), and Robert Garnier (1544-1590) were the leading French tragedians of the era before Racine. Corneille and Rotrou appear in The Red Sphinx.

- **48 ACTIVITY LIKE THAT WHICH TELEMACHUS SAW WHEN HE LANDED AT SALENTUM:** The Adventures of Telemachus (1699) by François Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, was a novel of moral instruction inveighing against the materialism and authoritarianism of France late in the reign of Louis XIV. Telemachus, the son of Ulysses, travels around the eastern Mediterranean learning various object lessons that are explained to him by his tutor, Mentor (no, really), who turns out to be Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, in disguise.
- **49 MOUSQUETON:** The loyal servant of Porthos throughout the Musketeers Cycle. As related in The Three Musketeers, his birth name was Boniface, but his master renamed him with the more martial French word for musketoone, a large-caliber musket cut down to the length of a carbine.
- **50 MOUSTON:** As related in Twenty Years

After, upon becoming a wealthy seigneur Porthos had his servant's name of Mousqueton (i.e., "Musketoön") abbreviated to the more respectable Mouston.

- **51 CERTAIN LETTERS TO MARIE MICHON:** In *The Three Musketeers*, Aramis corresponded with the intriguing Duchesse de Chevreuse, who hid her identity under the name Marie Michon.
- **52 ANTAEUS:** The giant of classical myth who drew limitless strength from the earth as long as he was touching the ground.
- **53 OLD ARMORICA:** The Romans called the Breton peninsula and nearby coasts Armorica, attested as early as the first century by Pliny the Elder.
- **54 BAZIN:** Throughout the *Musketeers Cycle*, Bazin serves as the loyal lackey and assistant of Aramis. Just as the scheming Aramis is the least sympathetic

of the musketeers, his servant, the pompous and selfish Bazin, is the least likeable of the lackeys, mainly serving as a butt for Dumas's jokes about churchmen.

- **55 PORTHOS ATE LIKE PELOPS:** For once, Dumas got a classical reference wrong, as in Greek myth Pelops was not the consumer but the consumed. Pelops's father was King Tantalus, who as an offering to the divines cut up his own son and served him in a stew to the gods of Olympus. The gods, miffed, reassembled Pelops and resurrected him.
- **56 CASTRAMETATION:** The military art of laying out and fortifying a camp; the term goes all the way back to the Roman army.
- **57 IN EXACTLY THE SITUATION HE'D FOUND HIM BEFORE IN THE INN AT CRÈVECŒUR:** A reference to Chapter XXVI, "The Thesis of Aramis," in *The Three Musketeers*.

- **58 AN ARQUEBUS:** The arquebus was a long-barreled, smooth-bored matchlock firearm, a predecessor of the musket and usually lighter than that weapon (though still heavy by modern standards).
- **59 FERRET, GOOD TROTTER THOUGH HE WAS, WASN'T THE MOUNT FOR THESE CIRCUMSTANCES:** And besides, Ferret had been left in a stable in Croisic in Chapter LXVIII.
- **60 THE GRANITE GIANT ON THE PLAINS OF AGRIGENTO:** At Agrigento, a site of Greek ruins in Sicily, a huge stone telamon (male caryatid) lies on its side near a fallen temple; Dumas had visited the site in 1840 and written of it in a travel book the following year.
- **61 CRIMES OF LÈSE-MAJESTÉ:** Such crimes are offenses that violate the dignity of the monarch or the state. The idea goes back to the late Roman period, when emperor and empire were viewed as one and the same; it was adopted by

European royalty during the rise of western nation-states and reached its peak during the period of absolute monarchs such as Louis XIV.

- **62 MADAME THE DOWAGER PRINCESS:** Marguerite of Lorraine, Duchesse d'Orléans (1615-1672), wife of Prince Gaston, was known as “Madame” just as Prince Gaston was known as “Monsieur.” After the death of Gaston in 1660 she was referred to as “the Dowager Madame.”
- **63 A WINDOW WE ALREADY KNOW:** The reader knows it from Chapter I of *Between Two Kings*, in which Montalais was first introduced and La Vallière made her first adult appearance in the *Musketeers Cycle*.
- **64 AS TALLEMANT DES RÉAUX WOULD SAY:** Gédéon Tallemant, Sieur des Réaux (1619-1692) was the author of the *Historiettes*, several volumes of gossipy mini-biographies filled with juicy anecdotes about prominent courtiers,

courtesans, writers, artists, and the nobility of the French Court. Dumas mined the *Historiettes* extensively for his novels set in the 17th century.

- **65 MARSHAL GRAMMONT:** Antoine III, Duc de Gramont or Grammont, Marshal of France (1604-1678), father of the Comte de Guiche (see *Historical Characters*), was a capable military commander during the Fronde who later served Louis XIV as a diplomat.
- **66 A GRAPE-STAINED ERIGONE:** In Greek myth, Erigone was the daughter of Icarius of Athens, who was killed by his shepherds after the god Dionysus gave them too much wine; when she heard that her father had been murdered, Erigone hanged herself. The implication is that Montalais is a woman of passions.
- **67 THIS PROTEAN FEMALE:** Proteus was a Greek sea god who could change his form at will; “protean” has come to mean changeable or adaptable.

- **68 POST HORSES:** The post horse system was a way of hiring horses by stages, turning in a rented horse at a “post” and then hiring another one, if necessary, for the next stage. Pack horses, carriages, and wagons could also be rented by post, usually coming with a hired driver who rode the lead horse and was called the postilion.
- **69 HÔTEL DE GRAMMONT:** The grand Paris mansion of the house of Gramont or Grammont, located just a few blocks north of the Palais Royal; Dumas jumped the gun a bit, giving it to the Grammonts three years before Louis XIV did, in 1664.
- **70 SHE’S A CRIPPLE:** Louise de La Vallière had a slight limp due to a childhood injury to her ankle, an accident recounted in *Twenty Years After*.
- **71 LE HAVRE:** A French seaport in Normandy at the mouth of the Seine on the English Channel. The city was only a

century and half old in 1661, having been established by King François I to replace the old harbors of Harfleur and Honfleur, which had silted up.

- **72 THAT NAME BRINGS NOTHING BUT SADNESS TO THE ROYAL HOUSE OF FRANCE:** A reference to the behavior of the first Duke of Buckingham as depicted in *The Three Musketeers*, where the duke's illicit courtship of Anne of Austria caused strife between the queen and King Louis XIII, and war between England and France.
- **73 THE ADMIRAL, THE DUKE OF NORFOLK:** There was no Duke of Norfolk who was a British admiral in 1661; Dumas may have been thinking of Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk, who was famously appointed Lord Admiral by his friend King Henry VIII in 1513.
- **74 SHUT HIMSELF UP LIKE ACHILLES IN HIS TENT:** In the Trojan war, after a

quarrel with King Agamemnon, the Greek hero Achilles refused to take any further part in the fighting and sat out battles sulking in his tent.

- **75 AN AEOLIAN HARP:** A legendary stringed instrument played by the movement of air across the strings and named after Aeolus, god of the wind; it was said to have sounded ethereal and otherworldly.
- **76 AT LENS, AT BLÉNEAU, AT THE DUNES:** Three battles in which Bragelonne fought for the French crown: the Battle of Lens in 1648 vs. the Spanish (recounted in *Twenty Years After*), the Battle of Bléneau in 1652 during the so-called Second Fronde, and the Battle of the Dunes in 1658, near Dunkirk in what was then known as the Spanish Netherlands.
- **77 THE FLYING SQUADRON, AS QUEEN CATHERINE USED TO CALL THEM:** In the 16th century, Queen Catherine de Médicis

maintained a bevy of young and attractive ladies-in-waiting at the French Court known popularly as her “flying squadron,” and frequently deployed as lures and honey traps for political ends.

- **78 MADAME DE CHALAIS AND MADAME DE LA FAYETTE:** Anne-Marie de La Trémouille, Madame de Chalais (1642-1722) and Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, Comtesse de La Fayette (1634-1693), prominent ladies of high rank at the French Court. Both were highly accomplished, Chalais as an international diplomat for France and La Fayette as the author of the celebrated novel *La Princesse de Clève* (1678).
- **79 MESDEMOISELLES DE CRÉQUY AND DE CHÂTILLON:** Madeleine de Créquy, the daughter of the famous general who later married Charles de La Trémouille, and Élisabeth-Angélique de Montmorency-Bouteville, Duchesse de Châtillon (1627-1695), widow of that Duc de Châtillon who was slain by Aramis at the

Battle of Charenton (as depicted in Blood Royal). Notorious for her amorous intrigues, Châtillon was certainly no mademoiselle in 1661, and it's unclear why Dumas titled her so.

- **80 HIS MEMOIRS:** Dumas, in his Author's Preface to *The Three Musketeers*, claimed to have discovered the story in "The Memoirs of the Comte de La Fère," a conceit he seemed to have immediately forgotten once the novel began. Here he returned to the idea by showing Athos at work on his long-overlooked memoirs.
- **81 DO YOU TAKE ME FOR A DON DIEGO:** In the first act of Pierre Corneille's play *Le Cid* (1637), Don Diego asks his son Don Rodrigo to fight on his behalf to avenge an insult to his honor.
- **82 MOLIÈRE:** Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), known as Molière, was the greatest French playwright of the 17th century, best known for his comedies satirizing the pretensions of the bourgeois

and the nobility. Dumas idolized him.

- **83 HER MORNING LEVER:** The lever (rising) was an official morning reception held at the bedside of every adult member of the royal House of France, and by other important members of the Court as well. The relative importance of a person could be measured by the quantity and quality of those who attended their lever.
- **84 MONSIEUR DE SAINT-RÉMY:** Jacques de Couravel, Marquis de Saint-Rémy, was First Chamberlain to Prince Gaston during his internal exile in Blois, and stepfather to Louise de La Vallière.
- **85 SOMETIMES, COUNT, IT IS RESISTED, I CAN ASSURE YOU:** A reference to Louis's early love affair with Mazarin's niece, Marie de Mancini (see Note 18), a romance which he dutifully broke off when it came time to marry Spanish princess Marie-Thérèse, as related in the early chapters of *Between Two Kings*.

- **86 LOST FOR SEVERAL DAYS IN A BEAUTIFUL DREAM:** This is most likely a reference to the tale in *A Thousand and One Nights* in which Badr al-Din is enchanted by djinni into a dream-state and spirited away to Damascus, where he is unsure whether he's asleep or awake.
- **87 BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN:** François de Montlezun, Seigneur de Baisemeaux or Besmeaux, Governor of the Bastille (c. 1613—1697). A Gascon like d'Artagnan, Baisemeaux came to Paris and joined the King's Musketeers in 1634, where it's known he was friends with the historical d'Artagnan during their shared time in the regiment. He saw action in Italy in the 1640s, and Cardinal Mazarin made him captain of his personal guard in 1649. He gained the prize office of Governor of the Bastille in 1658, a post he held for forty years until his death.
- **88 LETTRE DE CACHET:** A letter signed by the King of France, usually for imprisonment, a decree that cannot be

appealed.

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Learn more about Lawrence Ellsworth and his work at his website, swashbucklingadventures.net, and at musketeerscycle.substack.com. See you there!

Lawrence Ellsworth December, 2022

Historical Characters

ANNE OF AUSTRIA: Anne of Austria, “Anne d’Autriche,” Queen of France (1601–66). Eldest daughter of King Philip III of Spain and sister to King Philip IV, Anne was wed to King Louis XIII of France in a political marriage at the age of fourteen. A Spaniard among the French, unloved by the king, proud but intimidated, and vulnerable to manipulation by her friends, she wielded very little influence until she finally gave birth to a royal heir, the future Louis XIV, in 1638. After Louis XIII died in 1643, with his heir still a child, Anne was declared Queen Regent and thereafter came into her own, holding France together against threats both internal and external until Louis XIV was old enough to rule. Anne was intelligent and strong-willed but not a skilled politician; in that she was aided by her close association with her prime minister, Cardinal Mazarin. Were they lovers? Anne’s exact level of intimacy with Mazarin is a matter of conjecture; Dumas the novelist prefers the juiciest

possible interpretation.

ARAMIS: Aramis, Chevalier René d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes, is based loosely on Henri, Seigneur d'Aramitz (1620?–1655 or 1674), but Dumas drew the character from Courtilz de Sandras's fictionalized *Memoirs of Monsieur d'Artagnan* (circa 1700). In his pseudo-biography of d'Artagnan Sandras had made Aramis the brother of Athos and Porthos, but the historical d'Aramitz was a Gascon petty nobleman, an abbot who spent at least the first half of the 1640s serving under his uncle, Captain de Tréville, in the King's Musketeers. Sources disagree as to the date of his death. The sly and ambitious Aramis of the Musketeers Cycle is entirely an invention of Dumas.

Artagnan see D'ARTAGNAN

ATHOS: Athos, Comte de La Fère, is based loosely on Armand, Seigneur de Sillègue, d'Athos, et d'Autevielle (c. 1615–1643), as filtered through Courtilz de Sandras's fictionalized *Memoirs of Monsieur d'Artagnan*.

Though Sandras had made Athos the brother of Aramis and Porthos, the historical d'Athos was a Gascon petty nobleman who joined his cousins, Captain de Tréville and Isaac de Portau (Porthos) in the King's Musketeers in 1640. Little is known of his life; he was killed in a duel in December 1643. Dumas invented Athos's character and personality from whole cloth to suit his storytelling purposes.

BELLIÈRE: Suzanne de Bruc, Marquise de Plessis-Bellière (1608-1705) had been a widow since 1654; she was a friend and confidante to Fouquet and possibly more. (Dumas, for whom everything was romance, gave them a dramatic love affair.) Smart, articulate, socially adept, and cultured, the marquise introduced Fouquet to art and artists, and often helped organize his social affairs.

BRAGELONNE: Raoul, Vicomte de Bragelonne. The young viscount, son of the musketeer Athos, is almost entirely Dumas's invention, based solely on a single reference in

Madame de La Fayette's memoir of Henriette d'Angleterre, which mentions that in Louise de La Vallière's youth in Blois she had once loved a young man named Bragelonne. Raoul embodies all of Athos's noble virtues, even those unsuited to Louis XIV's less chivalrous age. His relationship with Louise de La Vallière—and her relationship with King Louis—are central to the final volumes of the Musketeers Cycle.

BUCKINGHAM: George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham (1628-1687) was the son and heir of the Buckingham who figured so prominently in *The Three Musketeers*, and an important secondary character in the later volumes of the Musketeers Cycle. A committed Royalist, he fought for Charles II and supported him during his exile, though Buckingham and Charles had a falling-out before the Restoration. After Charles regained the throne, however, Buckingham was soon restored to favor, but he was smitten with the king's sister Princess Henrietta, and scandal followed.

CHARLES: King Charles II, Charles Stuart, King of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1630-1685) was the exiled son of that King Charles I whose 1649 execution was depicted in *Blood Royal*. Dumas alluded to the intrigues and adventures of Charles II on his long road to Restoration without going into detail, but it was a full ten years of melodrama, reversals, frustration, and hairbreadth escapes. At first Charles had hopes of French support, but when Mazarin allied France with Cromwell in 1655, Charles and his exiled royalists on the continent were driven into the arms of Spain, and he actually led English royalist troops on the side of the Spanish against the French at the Battle of the Dunes in 1658. The 1660 visit to Louis XIV in *Between Two Kings* is fictional, but the role of General Monck in facilitating Charles's return and restoration is basically accurate. Dumas portrays Charles as a young Romantic-Era melancholy hero, but by contemporary accounts he was more impatient and entitled than tragic and resigned.

COLBERT: *Jean-Baptiste Colbert* (1619-1683) was a government administrator in various roles starting in 1649 and was about ten years older than depicted by Dumas in *Court of Daggers*. He served Mazarin throughout the 1650s, became interested in financial reform, and early on warned the minister that Superintendent Fouquet was peculating the state's tax money, though Dumas delays the conflict to link it with the rise of Louis XIV. What Dumas got right is that Louis recognized Colbert's talents and ambition and, mistrusting Fouquet, put Colbert in charge of his financial affairs.

CONDÉ: *Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Condé*, "Monsieur le Prince," later "The Grand Condé" (1621-1686). One of the most celebrated military commanders of his time, while he was still the Duc d'Enghien he won two signature victories in the long war against Spain, those of Rocroi in 1643 and Nördlingen in 1644. Upon the death of his father in 1646 Enghien became Prince de Condé, First Prince of the

Blood and third in line for the throne, but he continued his role as France's leading general, further cementing his military reputation with the victory at Lens in 1648. This was followed by his successful leadership of the royal troops in the first half of the Fronde, but then he turned to plotting against Mazarin, who in 1650 had Condé, his brother Conti, and his sister the Duchesse de Longueville arrested, thus triggering the Second Fronde. In the confusion that followed, Anne was forced to release Condé and his siblings, but Monsieur le Prince was by then her sworn enemy, and after the Fronde ended he left France to fight for Spain. Once the long Franco-Spanish war finally concluded in 1659, Condé was rehabilitated by Louis XIV and welcomed back to France, where he served with distinction until his death.

CONRART: Valentin Conrart (1603-1675), a protégé of Cardinal Richelieu, was an author, memoirist, and founding member of the Académie Française.

D'ARTAGNAN: Charles de Batz de Castelmore, Chevalier (later Comte) d'Artagnan (c. 1611–1673). The historical d'Artagnan was a cadet (younger son) of a family of the minor nobility from the town of Lupiac in Gascony. Like so many other younger sons of Gascony, he followed his neighbor Monsieur de Tréville to Paris to make his fortune, and by 1633 was in the King's Musketeers at a time when Tréville was a lieutenant. D'Artagnan spent the rest of his life in the musketeers, except for the periods when the company was briefly disbanded, when he soldiered with the Gardes Françaises. He gradually rose through the ranks until he became Captain-Lieutenant (in effect, Captain) of the Musketeers in 1667. During the Franco-Dutch War of 1673 he was killed at the Battle of Maastricht. Dumas famously borrowed d'Artagnan from Courtilz de Sandras's highly fictionalized biography, *The Memoirs of Monsieur d'Artagnan*, but his personality and character in the novels of the Musketeers Cycle are entirely the product of the genius of

Dumas.

DE GUICHE: Guy Armand de Gramont or Grammont, Comte de Guiche (1637-1673). Armand de Guiche, son of the Duc de Gramont, was one of the leading playboys of the Court of Louis XIV and a frequent favorite of both the king and his brother Monsieur. Dumas portrays him as a romantic cavalier with a touch of melancholy and makes him Raoul de Bragelonne's closest friend. A lover of both men and women, the historical de Guiche was one of Monsieur's leading bedmates before he was supplanted by the Chevalier de Lorraine, after which he took up with Monsieur's wife Madame.

DE WARDES: The Comte de Wardes is based on François-René Crespin du Bec, Marquis de Vardes (1621-1688), who under the name "Comte de Wardes" appeared in Sandras's *Memoirs of Monsieur d'Artagnan*, where Dumas found him and adopted him as a villain for *The Three Musketeers*. The de Wardes of *The Three Musketeers* was nearly twenty years older than the Marquis de

Vardes upon whom he was based, a notorious historical figure at the court of King Louis XIV known as a rake and a charming fraud. When Dumas needed a foil for Athos's son Raoul in *Court of Daggers*, Dumas invented a son of the Comte de Wardes from *The Three Musketeers*, a vengeful youth who had inherited his father's title. Dumas gave him the personality and some of the exploits of the historical Marquis de Vardes—thereby turning a single real person into two fictional villains!

D'Orléans see GASTON or PHILIPPE

Du Vallon see PORTHOS

FOUQUET: Nicolas Fouquet, Marquis de Belle-Île, Vicomte de Melun et Vaux (1615-1680) was a Parisian of the political class, precocious enough to join the Parliament of Paris as an avocat at age thirteen. At age twenty-five he married a wealthy heiress, who died a year later, and by twenty-seven he was a financial intendant in the province of Dauphiné. When Mazarin became Queen Anne's prime minister,

Fouquet attached himself to the new regime, serving the cardinal ably throughout the 1640s. During Mazarin's brief exile near the end of the Fronde, Fouquet looked after his interests in Paris, and as a reward the cardinal made Fouquet Superintendent of Finance. Dumas portrays him as a gallant cavalier, dashing and magnanimous, and Fouquet certainly spared no expense to convey that impression. He could well afford to do so: as a finance minister, he was at least as corrupt as Colbert makes him out to be in *Court of Daggers*.

FOUQUET, ABBOT: Basile Fouquet, Abbot Fouquet (1622-1680) held three abbacies but no inclination to practice religion; a servant of Mazarin, he was a spy and intriguer who ran the cardinal's secret police through most of the 1640s and 1650s. Dumas portrays him as a rather brutal ruffian, but he was far more clever and sophisticated than that, and helped his elder brother Nicolas achieve his high position. However, by the time of *Court of Daggers* Nicolas and Basile

had had a falling out and the abbot was no longer supporting the superintendent.

GASTON: Prince Gaston de Bourbon, Duc d'Orléans, "Monsieur" (1608–1660). Younger brother to Louis XIII and first heir to the throne, favorite son of Queen Marie de Médicis, Gaston seems to have had no redeeming characteristics whatsoever. Proud, greedy, ambitious for the throne but an arrant coward, he was the figurehead in one conspiracy after another against Louis XIII and Richelieu. These plots failed every time, after which Gaston invariably betrayed his co-conspirators in return for immunity from consequences—because as the healthy heir to a chronically unhealthy king, he knew his life was sacrosanct. Banished to internal exile in Blois in 1652, he lived out the remainder of his life in luxurious boredom.

GOURVILLE: Jean Hérault, Baron de Gourville (1625–1703) was a retainer to the Prince de Marcillac (see *Twenty Years After*) who assisted with his

master's intrigues during the Fronde. This brought him into contact with Mazarin and then Fouquet, who became his new patron. He served as one of Fouquet's corrupt tax farmers, diverting income to himself and Fouquet, and gaining enough to purchase the Barony of Gourville, after which he gave up finance and became a courtier.

Guiche see DE GUICHE

Henrietta see MADAME

HENRIETTE: Henriette Marie de Bourbon, Queen of England (1609-1669). Daughter of Henri IV and sister of Louis XIII, Henriette was married by proxy to England's Charles I shortly after he assumed the throne in 1625. Haughty, entitled, and fiercely Catholic when to be Catholic in England was a major liability, Henriette's relationship with Charles was stormy at first, but eventually they proved to be well matched, and she bore him nine children. (The youngest, named after her mother, this editor has chosen to call Henrietta to

differentiate the two.) During the English Civil War, she was forced to flee to France, where she lived in poverty until the Restoration.

Infanta see MARIE-THÉRÈSE

La Fère see ATHOS

LA FONTAINE: Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695) was a poet best known for his many volumes of Fables, published from 1668 to 1694. Charming but notoriously absent-minded, La Fontaine was one of the early literary protégés of Superintendent Fouquet, but he didn't find real fame until the mid-1660s, when he was one of the famous "Quartet of the Rue du Vieux Colombier" that also included Molière, Racine, and Boileau, the leading literary lights of their time.

LA PORTE: Pierre de La Porte, Cloak-Bearer to the Queen (1603-1680) entered Queen Anne's service in 1621 and was for decades one of her most trusted confidential servants. The 1839 edition of La Porte's Memoirs was one of Dumas's primary sources. La Porte will reappear in an important

(albeit non-historical) role in the final book in the Musketeers Cycle, *The Man in the Iron Mask*.

LA VALLIÈRE: Françoise-Louise de la Baume Le Blanc de La Vallière (1644-1710). Louise de La Vallière was raised in Blois at the court of Prince Gaston, and after coming to Versailles in 1661 became the first long-term mistress of King Louis XIV. Louise was introduced in *Twenty Years After* as a girl of age seven and returns here as a young woman of seventeen. As the love of Raoul's life, she will be a central character in the next two volumes, *Devil's Dance* and *Shadow of the Bastille*.

LORET: Jean Loret (1600-1665) was a French writer, poet, and proto-journalist who published a weekly periodical called the *Gazette Burlesque* of reports in verse satirizing the people and events of the French Court. Fouquet was his chief patron, and he continued to support the minister after his arrest, for which Colbert cut off his income.

LORRAINE: Philippe de Lorraine-Armagnac, Chevalier de Lorraine (1643-1702) was the closest and most enduring of Prince Philippe's male lovers, the virtual ruler of Monsieur's household when he was in favor. A member of the prolific Guise family, the rulers of the independent Duchy of Lorraine, Philippe de Lorraine was a younger son without prospects or a large inheritance; he was known as the Chevalier de Lorraine because he joined the Knights of Malta at an early age, which perhaps indicated that he was intended for a life of arms. But he didn't pursue a career in the Order, instead coming to the Court of France in 1658 where he quickly became a favorite of Prince Philippe, Monsieur. The chevalier was much as Dumas described him, handsome, suave, waspish, greedy, and manipulative. A perennial rival for royal favor with the Comte de Guiche, he was at odds with Princess Henrietta, Madame, from the moment of her arrival from England.

LOUIS XIV: Louis de Bourbon, King of France (1638-1715): The only Frenchman of his century more

important than Cardinal Richelieu, the Sun King consolidated all power in France under royal control, thus ending centuries of civil strife, but creating a political structure so rigid it made the French Revolution almost inevitable. Dumas and his assistants did considerable research into the life of Louis XIV, and his depiction of the king's character and personality is mostly spot on. The final volumes of the Musketeers Cycle chart Louis's rise to maturity and power through the eyes of the Four Musketeers, Dumas's most enduring characters.

Louise see LA VALLIÈRE

MADAME: Princess Henrietta-Maria Stuart, Henrietta of England, “Madame” (1644-1670), the youngest child of King Charles I and Queen Henriette-Marie, was born during the English Civil War and raised in exile in France, where she and her mother lived for many years in poverty. Though bright and observant, she was disregarded as a child, one royal orphan too many, and it wasn't until after the Restoration of her brother

Charles II that she was suddenly recognized as someone who mattered. In 1661 she was wed in a political marriage to Philippe de Bourbon, younger brother of Louis XIV, and became one of the leading ornaments of the French Court. Vivacious and beautiful, Henrietta was loved, or at least desired, by both Buckingham and de Guiche, but she set her own romantic sights at a higher target. Madame and the Chevalier de Lorraine were perennial rivals for control of Monsieur's household, and at her death, probably from peritonitis, she was said to have been poisoned by the Chevalier.

MALICORNE: Germain Texier, Comte d'Hautefeuille, Baron de Malicorne (1626-1694), an ambitious courtier and the lover of Mademoiselle de Montalais. Though the historical Malicorne was a petty nobleman, Dumas makes him a bourgeois, an aspiring lawyer, to add the drama of class difference to his romance with Montalais.

MANICAMP: Louis de Madaillan de

Lesparre, Seigneur de Manicamp (c. 1628-1708) was a French nobleman who served with distinction as a military officer under the Prince de Condé from 1646 onward, fighting at the Battle of Lens and at Charenton on the royalist side during the Fronde. Of the historical character, Dumas used only his name, and the Manicamp who appears in *Court of Daggers* is otherwise entirely fictional.

MARIE-THÉRÈSE: Marie-Thérèse of Austria, Infanta of Spain and Portugal, Queen of France (1638-1683), was wed to her cousin King Louis XIV in 1660 in a marriage that signified the end of the long war between France and Spain. Raised in the rigid and insular Spanish Court, timid and retiring, she had little worldly experience before her marriage and would have been lost and alone in Paris if her mother-in-law, Queen Anne—herself a Spanish princess married young to a French king—hadn't taken her under her wing. She adored her new husband Louis and was happy while he was faithful to her, a period of almost a year.

MAZARIN: Cardinal Jules Mazarin, born Giulio Raimondo Mazzarino or Mazarini (1602-1661). In 1634 the Italian-born diplomat became a protégé of Cardinal Richelieu and in 1639 was naturalized French and entered the king's service. Through Richelieu's influence he was made a cardinal in 1641 and brought onto the King's Council. After Richelieu and Louis XIII died, Mazarin made himself indispensable to the regent, Anne of Austria, and basically stepped into Richelieu's shoes to become France's prime minister. He was probably intimate with Queen Anne and functioned as her co-ruler until Louis XIV attained his majority. Mazarin was an extremely able diplomat, negotiating an end to the Thirty Years War, maintaining royal authority through the chaotic years of the Fronde, striking an alliance with Cromwell, and maneuvering the fractious French nobility back into compliance with the crown in time to hand an intact and flourishing state over to King Louis XIV. He was widely disliked for being a foreigner and

arriviste who presumed to place himself above the native nobility, feelings basically endorsed by Dumas, who preferred men of heart to men of mind.

Monsieur see GASTON or PHILIPPE

Monsieur le Cardinal see MAZARIN

Monsieur le Prince see CONDÉ

MONTALAIS: Aure (actually Nicole-Anne Constance) de Montalais (c. 1641-?). Mademoiselle de Montalais was a maid of honor at the court of Prince Gaston, and later dame d'honneur to Princess Henrietta in Paris, where she helped arrange an affair between the princess and the Comte de Guiche. Though she is said to have had a taste for intrigue, little else is known about her, and her personality is largely an invention of Dumas.

MOTTEVILLE: Françoise Bertaut, Madame de Motteville (c. 1621-1689) was a loyal companion to Anne of Austria for much of her life. Her father was an officer of the French Court but

her mother was Spanish, a secretary to Queen Anne who may have come with her from Spain. Françoise joined Anne's entourage on a permanent basis in 1642 after the death of Louis XIII when Anne became queen regent. She was a close friend and confidante of the queen until Anne's death, and though she personally stayed out of politics and Court intrigue, she was a diligent diarist who took notes on everything. Her Memoirs were first published in 1723 and republished frequently thereafter; the 1838 edition was one of Dumas's primary sources.

NAVAILLES: Susanne de Baudéan de Neuillant de Parabere, Duchesse de Navailles (1625 or 1626-1700) was Queen Marie-Thérèse's premier lady-in-waiting from 1660 to 1664. Pious and upright, she was outraged by King Louis's adulterous pursuit of the royal maids of honor and was eventually banished from Court from speaking her mind about it once too often.

Orléans see GASTON or PHILIPPE

PELLISSON: Paul Pellisson (1624-1693)

was a French writer and historian who served as Superintendent Fouquet's secretary. He remained loyal throughout all Fouquet's troubles, and even served time in the Bastille on his patron's behalf.

PHILIPPE: Prince Philippe de Bourbon, Duc d'Anjou, later Duc d'Orléans, "Petit Monsieur," "Monsieur" (1640-1701), was the younger brother of Louis XIV, but to keep him from assuming the fractious role his uncle Prince Gaston had taken under his brother Louis XIII, Philippe was never trained to rule or consider himself entitled to assume the throne. He was openly homosexual but did his duty to the dynasty and married twice, producing six children. Though he was a capable military commander, his first concern was always luxury and ease, which he pursued without stint.

PORTHOS: Porthos, Baron du Vallon, is based loosely on Isaac de Porthau (1617-1712), as filtered through Courtilz de Sandras's fictionalized *Memoirs of Monsieur d'Artagnan*. Though Sandras had made Porthos the

brother of Aramis and Athos, the historical de Porthau was a minor Gascon nobleman who joined his cousins, Captain de Tréville and Armand d'Athos, in the King's Musketeers in 1642. When his father died in 1654, he left the musketeers and returned to Béarn, where he served as a parliamentarian and local magistrate until his death in 1712. His character and personality in the Musketeers novels are entirely the invention of Dumas.

Queen see ANNE OF AUSTRIA, MARIE-THÉRÈSE, or HENRIETTE

Queen Anne see ANNE OF AUSTRIA

Queen Mother see ANNE OF AUSTRIA

Raoul see BRAGELONNNE

SAINT-RÉMY, MADAME: Françoise Le Prévôt de la Coutelaye, Madame de Saint-Rémy was an oft-married lady of the Touraine who was the wife of Laurent de la Baume le Blanc when she gave birth, in 1644, to Louise de La Vallière. Her third husband, the Marquis de Saint-Rémy, was First

Chamberlain to Prince Gaston in Blois.

TONNAY-CHARENTE: Françoise-Athénaïs de Rochechouart de Mortemart, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, (later) Madame de Montespan (1641-1707), maid of honor to Princess Henrietta, was a daughter of the old nobility renowned for both beauty and wit. In 1663 she married the Marquis de Montespan and proceeded to become one of the reigning ladies of the French Court. She set her sights on the king himself, resolving to replace La Vallière as the king's main mistress, and by 1667 she succeeded.

Vallon see PORTHOS

VANEL: Anne-Marguerite Vanel, Madame Coiffier (1644-1703) was the daughter of Claude Vanel, a Parisian financier, and married Jean Coiffier, a master of accounts, so she had a keen understanding of and interest in financial matters. Tallemant des Réaux described her as “a tiny creature but quite pretty.” Marguerite had a distinct preference for money

men: she became Fouquet's mistress in the late 1650s, but later transferred her affections to Colbert.

VATEL: François Vatel (1631?-1671) was the maître d'hôtel for Nicolas Fouquet and, after him, for the Prince de Condé. His personal attention to detail was legendary, and he took preparations so seriously that when things went wrong at a grand banquet Monsieur le Prince gave for Louis XIV, Vatel's shame was so great that he committed suicide.

Wardes see DE WARDES